































LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

Claire Falkenstein

Interviewed by Marjorie Rogers

Completed under the auspices  
of the  
Oral History Program  
University of California  
Los Angeles

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#### LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

This interview is one of a series, entitled "Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait," funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and conducted from July 1, 1975, to March 31, 1977, by the UCLA Oral History Program. The project was directed jointly by Page Ackerman, University Librarian, and Gerald Nordland, Director, UCLA Art Galleries, and administered by Bernard Galm, Director, Oral History Program. After selection of interview candidates and interviewers, the Program assumed responsibility for the conduct of all interviews and their processing.





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## INTRODUCTION

Though she has lived most of her life in California, Claire Falkenstein is an artist with international ideas, experience, and reputation. Primarily a sculptor, she has expressed her philosophy of life through teaching, writing, and filmmaking as well.

Born in 1908 to a family of West Coast pioneers, Falkenstein was raised, first, in Coos Bay, Oregon, and, later, in the San Francisco Bay Area, where her studies in art, anthropology, and philosophy brought her into contact with emigre intellectuals and artists. At the University of California, Berkeley, she was encouraged by French painter George Lusk to explore her innermost feelings through her work, and at Mills College she studied with Alexander Archipenko. By 1950, when she finally departed for a tour of Europe and visits with major figures in modern sculpture, Falkenstein had been exhibited extensively in the Bay Area (from as early as her twenty-second year), had written art criticism as Bay Area correspondent of Arts and Architecture, and had taught at her alma mater, the Anna Head School, and at Mills, UC Extension, the San Francisco Museum of Art, and the San Francisco Art Institute, whose faculty included Richard Diebenkorn, Hassel Smith, and Clyfford Still.





The sojourn in Europe was to have lasted six weeks; it lasted the better part of thirteen years (until 1963) instead. Enthralled by the continent, with visits to the studios of Henry Moore and Constantin Brancusi, Falkenstein decided to stay; she needed time to evaluate her role and status as an artist. Feeling that she had outgrown the limited opportunities of San Francisco, she wanted to live and work within a broader cultural context.

From 1950 to 1959, Falkenstein occupied a one-room studio in the St.-Germain-des-Pres. A contract with the Galerie Stadler supported her during those years. Eventually she became not only self-supporting but acclaimed by critics, curators, collectors, and dealers as well.

Returning intermittently to the States, she taught a summer session at San Francisco Art Institute in 1958 and established a studio in New York City in 1959.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, Falkenstein completed a series of highly imaginative commissions, mostly in new materials. Her earliest work had been in such traditional materials as wood and clay. She gradually shifted to bronze, copper, steel, plastics, and glass, creating web-like structures. In 1954, for example, she designed and built a floor-to-ceiling sculpture within a stairwell for the Galleria Spazio in Rome and followed this, in 1957, with a set of gates, twenty-seven feet wide and fourteen feet





high, for the entrance to the Santa Marinella grotto of Princess Pignatelli, wherein the "sign and ensemble" concept, which subsequently characterized her work, first was manifested. As a result of leading an Italian art tour for the San Francisco Museum in 1960, famed twentieth-century art collector Peggy Guggenheim commissioned a set of gates for her Venetian palazzo.

An invitation from Esther Robles to create a fountain in Los Angeles in 1961 drew Falkenstein back once again to America. Since then she has probably completed more sculptural commissions in Southern California than any other artist.

In 1965 she designed a major fountain-sculpture, Structure and Flow, No. 2, for installation in front of the California Federal Savings and Loan Building on Wilshire Boulevard. This project led to Game Wall (1965), a relief adorning the gymnasium exterior at California State University, Fullerton. "U" as a Set is another fountain-sculpture, commissioned in 1965 by California State University, Long Beach, for the First International Sculpture Symposium. In 1966 Falkenstein made Three Fires for the Fresno Mall, the first works to come from her new Venice, California, studio.

No doubt the artist's most ambitious project was the exterior sculpture at St. Basil's Catholic Church.



Begun in 1966 and completed in 1969, the commission consisted of a rectory screen, eight screenlike entrance doors, and fifteen three-dimensional, stained glass windows of Corten steel. The Wilshire Boulevard church's nave windows are eighty feet high; those of the tower are 130 feet high. There are sixteen colors used in the windows, which are framed in Corten steel. Falkenstein worked without interruption for a year and a half to produce the window modules.

Many of Falkenstein's sculptures, though abstract, suggest organic shapes and reflect her philosophy of penetrating nature through art. Her manner of working, moreover, resembles a process of growth. Usually beginning with drawings, she plays with ideas until a specific image crystallizes. Elaborating, she prepares a model. Once the full-scale work is begun, she feels free to transform her thoughts further still. She enjoys encounters with chance--feeling they are inevitable--while still maintaining control. For her, art and life represent journeys of discovery and self-fulfillment.

--George Goodwin, 1980





## INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Marjorie Rogers, editor-interviewer,  
Oral History Program. B.A., Art, UCLA.

### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Falkenstein's studio/home in Venice, California.

Dates: September 16, 23, October 10, 28, November 7, 18, December 2, 18, 1976; January 20, 22 (video sessions), 1977.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: All sessions were daytime sessions, lasting on average one hour and a half. Thirteen and a half hours of conversation altogether were recorded.

Persons present during interviews: Falkenstein and Rogers. Nancy Rogers, Nancy Olexo, and Sally Shapiro assisted in the preparation of the videotape.

### CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

The interview was structured chronologically.

### EDITING:

Editing was done by Lawrence Weschler, assistant editor, Oral History Program. He checked the verbatim transcript against the original tape recordings and edited for spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. He also verified all proper nouns. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

The final transcript remains in the order of the original taped material, but there are some deletions. The program grants to all of its interviewees the privilege of restricting portions of the transcript. Material that would have appeared on pages 32 and 193 have been deleted and is so indicated explicitly on those pages. Other, generally shorter deletions are indicated throughout the text by this symbol: [##]. All of Tape IX, Side One has been restricted at the interviewee's request.

George Goodwin wrote the introduction. Other front matter and the index were prepared by Program staff.



SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings and edited transcripts of the interviews are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of noncurrent records of the University.





TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 16, 1976

ROGERS: Claire Falkenstein, why don't we talk a little bit about your background, your family, and your years when you were a child? Would you like to start off with giving us some information about your grandparents, your ancestors?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I never knew my grandparents, except my grandmother, who was very old when I knew her, because my father [Louis Frank Falkenstein] was the last of nine children. His father, my grandfather [Valentine Von Falkenstein] was--I don't really know how old he was when he left Germany and came to America, came across the plains and landed in California. I don't even know what year it was, but it was in the early years of the Gold Rush. He met his wife, which is my grandmother, who was very much younger than he and had come up by way of Panama, and they met in California. From what I gather, they were the two first white persons married in Siskiyou County. That's where they landed, and that's where they lived and had all their children. He was a student in Germany, a medical student. But I don't think he finished his studies because he got embroiled in the political upheaval of the middle 1800s. Now, I haven't read much about the history of Germany at that time, who it was and what it was, but he escaped from Germany, and I think he had to leave because



he was being pursued because of his political attitudes. So he came to America and landed in Washington. He was given 100 men to cross the plains to come to the West Coast. Really, the only thing that I know about this is just tales that I've heard from my relatives and from my father and so on. He had two skirmishes with the Indians (very curious that he'd fight for liberty in Germany and then he'd fight the Indians in America) and came all the way to California. As I say, he landed in Siskiyou County and stayed there until he died. Now, I don't know how old he was when he died (I don't think very old; I think in his thirties). But before that, with all these children, he was the one who delivered them from her. He was the only one in the area who knew anything about medicine, and he was kind of like the one who would help the Indians and help the white people and help everybody (I don't like to say white and Indian, but whatever you want to say--the natives and the intruders, if you want to call them that). As I say, I really don't know much about him.

On my mother's side, I don't know anything about my grandparents; I knew my grandmother [Abigail Custer Lindley], but I don't know anything about my grandfather. She was married again. I think my mother's father deserted my grandmother and she remarried. She had had these two little children, and one is my mother and one was my mother's brother [Ward Lindley]. They were English.





My mother's name was [Clara Mae] Lindley, and her mother's name was Custer, and she was a relative of General Custer, I think probably a niece or something. So there's this combination of Anglo-Saxon; I mean, I'm probably all Anglo-Saxon in the sense of German on one side and English on the other.

My father grew up in Siskiyou County; my mother grew up in Northern California, too. I know they met in Eureka. He had studied at a business college which offered this job at Coos Bay [Oregon] when they married. They married and went up to Coos Bay, and I was born [July 22, 1908] along with my other two sisters (I was the youngest; there were three of us). My two sisters were--one [Doris] was six years older, and one [Helen] was four years older. And when I was twelve we moved away from Coos Bay and came to San Francisco. But one of the things about my work now which remains is this sense of nature and natural phenomena, which I feel is one of the prime movers of my work. It's the interstices and the natural interstices, the felt interstices of anything--that is, the space between. And it comes through in nature in the verdure of Oregon. I don't know whether you've ever been to Oregon, but Oregon is really, especially on the coast, a very lush kind of natural environment. And I grew up with that. In this documentary that's being made on me right now,\* they went

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\*Title, Claire Falkenstein-Sculptor; Producer-director, Jae Carmichael. [C.F.]



up to Coos Bay and photographed the area of the coast, the rugged Oregon coast, and the growths, the trees and the undergrowths, which are fantastic. And of course, up to twelve years, I suppose, you know, is a very formative time in a child's life, in a human being's life. So anyway, we came down.

My mother was really a very marvelous, instinctive and warm human being. For instance, in Coos Bay, my father was the manager of the lumber mill. So here was the owner of the mill [Louis Simpson], the banker [Charles Winsor], the store owner [Byler], and my father, who was the manager--there were just about three or four families who were like social equals. So our house, in which I was born--I don't know about my sisters; I don't think they were born there; I think they were born in another house--but this house was the first house of the owner, and then they moved away and built another house. But our house was their first house. It was a very nice house; it was all on one floor, and it was like an L. And my mother had this instinctive style about her: she didn't have much formal education (I don't know how much education she had), but she had a sense of style and a sense of quality. And our home was so marvelous because of the things that were in it and then the things that weren't in it. It wasn't crowded; it was open. It was spatial--it had a sense of space. Everybody who





came in there realized it. And even today, when I see people who knew the family then--for instance, I went up to Coos Bay and did a fountain recently on the Coos Bay mall (Sign of the Pacific), and I met some of the people there who had known the family in the early days (I mean, when we were there), and they said, "Your house was so marvelous, you know, because it was so different from everybody else's house." Well, it was my mother's instinctive sense of style. Everyone says, "Claire, did you have any artists in your background?" Well, I don't know of any, but my mother was an example of someone who just knew and had taste. [tape recorder turned off] No really formal education in art--it was an instinctive sense of the right spatial organization, or the right volume perception, whatever you want to call it. You were going to ask me a question about my grandfather.

ROGERS: Well, for the record could you tell us his name?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, he was Valentine von Falkenstein. He came, as I said, from Germany at this middle--now, I don't know what year; I never found out, because I wasn't interested when I could have found out, and now it's too late because everybody's gone that I could ask. But he came in the middle 1800s--'48, '46, '47, I don't know--and from what I gather, he had broken all connections with Europe. But his wife, my grandmother, had a brother and I think several relatives, so there was some connection there.



[tape recorder turned off] So I remember when I was a child and my father would talk of various--like when we would have dinner, he would be talking about the family, and he said, "Well, you know, there were robber barons in my background." One of the crests, because there were several crests in the family, were three red carnations--or maybe this was only part of the crest, because I wasn't interested and never followed it. But the three red carnations were--this is very gory--were three bodies being thrown over the cliff and the blood spurting out; they landed in a certain way and they made a symbol out of it. But you see, the Schloss Falkenstein exists still in Germany, in Bavaria--Schloss means "castle"--it still is there. You know, just stories like that. I listened as a child, and it was just kind of interesting; in a way, I thought, "Oh, he's crazy, why does he talk about things like that?" I never was particularly interested until I went to Europe in 1950 and I became acquainted with a lot of people in France. I didn't really pursue Germany very much because I was interested in France, and I lived in France and worked in France. But I became acquainted with all these people who were absolutely agog about the history of families, especially in relation to royal blood of one kind or another. You see, the robber barons were, I think, the real vandals of the Middle Ages, but everything got kind of glossed over just out of the sense of power. But they were very interested in France





about this thing about me that I had this in my background. So, when I became acquainted with Michel Tapié, who is Michel Tapié de Celéran and was born in a castle in the south of France, in Albi or Toulouse (he's from the south; in fact, he's a relative of Toulouse-Lautrec)--here he was, you know, reestablishing me as Claire von Falkenstein [laughter] because I was from that part of Germany and from that old Middle Ages family. Well, I looked it up in the dictionary, and it seems the first known of the Falkensteins was in the ninth century. And in the twelfth century two of them went off to the Crusades. [laughter] And that's all I know about them. There were two Falkensteins in the second crusade, Croisade.

ROGERS: You were talking about your mother and your home in Coos Bay. I'd like to go back to that now and have you think back to some of your days and childhood experiences in Coos Bay, and your school years, anything that would stand out as really a--what should we say?--a root experience, a seminal experience.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the only thing I can say is Coos Bay was just nature, nature, nature, except. . . . Our house was primitive compared to another house, which was like a museum and probably set me towards art in a way that I never would have been had that house not existed, that collector not existed. Because it was like a museum. That was called Shore Acres, and Shore Acres was the home



of Louis Simpson. He was the owner of the mill and had traveled widely and brought back all these things and built this marvelous house. He had acreage on the cliff, and they called it Shore Acres. And this place was like a cultural center. I don't know if anyone else was set off by it, but, boy, I was. I think I wouldn't be I, if it hadn't been for that collection of works.

ROGERS: Was this open to the public?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, no, it was a private home and it was his collection. It was like, now, for instance, if you go into the [Gifford] Phillips home, or if you go into the home of the [Frederick] Weismans--I haven't been in Norton Simon's home. But it's comparable when you think in terms of the environment, because it was a collection of paintings, sculpture, all kinds of things--I mean, exotic things like trees producing oranges in the house--I mean, it was just fabulous. And this was up in Coos Bay, where there was nothing. The only thing you could think of there would be the funny paper--I mean, there was nothing else. And suddenly here's this exotic house, full of marvelous things--and especially to a child. The first time I saw it, I must have been five--three, four, five, six--and when I was seven, I think, we spent a whole summer on the beach, which was right down from Shore Acres, and we went up there several times for dinner. He not only had the house, but he had gardens, and he had the prize bull, a Durham





bull, and prize horses. You know, he was just kind of a connoisseur of--and big artichokes; first time I ate an artichoke was there. You know, just a connoisseur, he was.

ROGERS: That's a rare experience for a young child to have lived in such close proximity to someone that can give them so much exposure to that kind of . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, to be so young and to realize that this was something. And I think it was something by contrast. I mean, it was so great because of the contrast.

ROGERS: What do you remember as your own experience working with art? What did you do as a child?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'm trying to think of some of the things I did. Everything was on my own; I had no guidance. I remember doing modeling and doing mud things, but they were clay, because, you see, there's a lot of clay and a lot of sand. It was all just open; there was nothing paved over or anything. You'd go in a sand bank and find some clay, and you just molded things. I remember making things out of clay. Nothing exists now that I ever did. But I did little things; I don't know what, but I made things. One thing I do remember: that summer that we spent on the beach, I made a whole environment. I built a house, you know, little (everything was in miniature), out of moss and sticks and stones, and I built it around the base of a tree. I had little paths and trees (I'd make them out of ferns). I put a mirror in for a lake. And everybody was astonished,



you know: here I was, seven years old and doing this, all around this tree. [laughter] It turned out to be so great that I would look at it. And I was working at it every day, you know, in between going swimming and walking on the beach and riding a horse, because we had a horse given us while we were there, and there were just a lot of things that we were doing. But in between I was working on this environment; I remember that.

ROGERS: Did you have an opportunity to work with tools at all when you were a child?

FALKENSTEIN: No. Except when I went out to the farm. My father's sister, who was almost like his mother because she was so much older (I think he was the youngest boy out of all these children, and she was next to the eldest--that was my Aunt Louise [Walker], she was there on this farm, out at Ten Mile. I don't know how far away it was; I couldn't tell you. I can't remember how we got there, even. But I would go there often in the summer. I remember I built something with hammer and nails and pieces of sticks and stones and made a raft. That's all I can remember. [laughter] I called it Louise.

ROGERS: Was your father a craftsman in any way?

FALKENSTEIN: No. And this is something that later on, especially during the Depression, that I was absolutely incensed about, that he wasn't developed as a craftsman in some way, because there was no relief for him. It was



a complete collapse, and there was no relief; he had no resources within himself. It was just terrible.

ROGERS: Was there any built-in resistance to working with your hands, do you think?

FALKENSTEIN: He, or me?

ROGERS: He.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know. I don't know what it was. In fact, I didn't have too much communication with my father. But I never saw him do anything ever with his hands. I remember when I was in school--here we were in the midst of the Depression, you know, everything falling around our ears, and I found him, you know, just absolutely in depression. I thought, "Oh, if only he could do something for himself." But he couldn't. But I think this is one of the things that pushed me so avidly to develop myself, my interior. To hell with money, to hell with anything, just develop yourself.

ROGERS: Have built-in skills.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: Well, then, work around the home and all the developing of the things in your home in Coos Bay was done by your mother, wasn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, my mother was the one that made the big impression on me. She seemed to have been the progressive one and to have been the one to make the decisions with us. Now, I don't know how it worked before





it got to us children--you know, between them. I don't know. It was a very difficult thing for me to understand their relationship. I couldn't.

ROGERS: What about your school years?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, when I was in grammar school, up to the eighth grade--through the seventh grade I was there. Then when I was twelve, I came down to Berkeley and went to a school for a month and then went to another school and finished my eighth grade. And that was a big jump, I tell you, to come from Coos Bay to Berkeley and get into one of those big city schools--oooh, I got in more trouble.

ROGERS: What kind of a school did they have at Coos Bay?

FALKENSTEIN: Just a public school.

ROGERS: Was it all the grades in one?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no, it was more advanced than that. I remember Central School, where I went. I can remember going to first grade and second grade and third grade--no, I don't remember the third grade (what happened to that?), but I remember the fifth grade. And then I transferred over to Westside, and for the first time I got acquainted with a teacher; I mean, a teacher really took interest in me. She encouraged me to write poetry. And she said, "Claire, you're the one to beat the triangle for the children to march in after lunch," so I was beating the triangle. [laughter] And her name was Miss Gamble. I



don't know why she liked me so much, but she really did. I think that was in the seventh grade. Fifth grade, I guess--I was still over at Central School. And then I came down; I left all these friends and became reacquainted with them last year. And I tell you, it was a shock. I have a picture of a birthday party; it must have been when I was about eight, seven or eight, I guess. Here are all these kids, sitting around looking at the camera. And I saw them up there last year. They looked like themselves to a degree, but what a change in all those years!

ROGERS: Did you see yourself as you might have been if you'd never left Coos Bay?

FALKENSTEIN: I never want to think about it. I can't imagine what it would have been. And I can't imagine how they managed to stay there. And yet, when I went back up there, some of the people are so absolutely marvelous. But the ones who are marvelous are the ones who got out of there for their schooling; they went to the University of Oregon or someplace, and they developed right there. But I wouldn't be I at all if I had stayed there. And I think my mother was the one who just uprooted us and got us out.

ROGERS: She did that for all of you?

FALKENSTEIN: I have a feeling she did. She thought she was saving us. I don't know.

ROGERS: What about sports? Were you really active, physically active?





FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was when I was a child. I was on the basketball team, and I was on everything. Then when we came down here, I was on the rowing crew. I mean, there was no concentration at all on art, just sheer excitement about living and being with people and exploring the possibilities of myself in this way or that way. But when I went to high school, that stopped; I was finished with it. It was only through grammar school. I never continued it through high school in any way, with sports. And I never continued in college in any way. Absolutely finished.

ROGERS: But you were very outgoing, active, and success-oriented then, up until your high school years?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I think I was just very normal, very natural. And then in high school, I think, the thing that slayed me was the social thing. I suppose it was growing up, puberty, growing out of childhood into a woman, you know, and the sex drives--honestly, all these boys and wild parties.

ROGERS: You were tall for your age?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: Was that a problem?

FALKENSTEIN: No, it wasn't a problem, except I always could pass. . . . Here I was--how old?--fourteen, and I looked to be about seventeen. So I would be invited out to all these things. My mother didn't really stop any of us too much; I mean, she let us go pretty freely. I don't



know whether it was good or bad. I think probably it was good. It was good for me; I don't know how good it was for Doris or Helen, my two sisters. See, in my last year in high school, I went to a girls' school, and the main reason was I think because it was just so hard to study in a public school, so hard to concentrate, because so much is going on, especially between the boys and girls, you know. So my mother put me in a private girls' school, and that was the Anna Head School in Berkeley, which was very good because I knuckled down and got good grades and got all my recommendations and went on to University of California at Berkeley. From then on, I began studying very hard. And in my junior year, the big thing happened to me: I became absolutely involved in art.

All this time I had been playing with it. For instance, in grammar school, there was this one teacher, Miss Holman, and she'd give these exercises. I would get involved with them and just forget everything and really do them, and that was probably the first teacher who became interested in me as an art person. I mean, she saw some kind of passion there for art in me. And she was very, very, very friendly. She was like Miss Gamble. Miss Gamble saw something else in me (I don't know what she saw in me), but this Miss Holman really saw me as a budding something or other.

And then nothing happened until when I went to high



school. And there, there were several teachers. I remember Mr. Gaylord in history. We were studying world history; it must have been my sophomore year. And he was so nice and so charming. I remember these little drawings in our history book, those little ink drawings, those little black-and-white engravings, and there was a Michelangelo. This was in my sophomore year. I'd never seen or heard or been told about Michelangelo, but I saw this thing and I thought, "God, how marvelous." It really gave me gooseflesh to look at it, and for the first time I realized about proportion. Here was this fantastic use of proportion. Here I was only about fourteen or fifteen--fifteen, I guess--and I'd never been, you know, instructed or told. I told him, I said, "You know, this really is very strange. How can he do that? Why does it make me feel this way?" He began to talk to me about the history of art.

And then, the next thing that happened to me in high school was Miss Shoemaker. I think more than anything she was the first, most civilized person I'd ever met, an all-around cultured woman. I found her to be extraordinary because she could talk on all these subjects and be very calm and have good control of language and so on. Later on, when I graduated from college and was teaching, I saw her again, and I told her how I felt about her. She couldn't believe it, you know; she was just doing her teaching job. She didn't realize how effective she was.





Well, she was with me anyway, and I think she was with lots of students. You see how important teachers are?

ROGERS: Yes. And a good teacher can change the whole course of someone's life.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. But then it was still like a dialectical materialism with me. Everything was just building up slowly in quantity, no really qualitative change yet. I was just sort of step by step going along. But the big qualitative change happened in my junior year in college, and that was in a class in life drawing. It was a man [George Lusk] who had been brought from Europe; although he was American, he was working in Paris. He'd been working with André Lhôte and had the Parisian attitude toward art, toward space, towards pattern, towards control of, let's say, two-dimensional, three-dimensional form, in a personal way, without looking toward tradition but sort of looking into your own interior--you know, personal control. It seemed to me that up to that time I had always been wondering, you know, where is this control? Where is that control? Where is it? Is it up there? Is it there? And suddenly I realized it's in myself. And that happened in my junior year. So I became like a madwoman. I was absolutely wildly happy and working and doing and exploring and . . . Well, this guy, I know he awakened me, and I know he awakened two or three others, but in general he was thought to be a real hazard to the art department.



[laughter] He only lasted one year, and they put him out. That was the end of him. But he had made his mark on me. I still had a year to go, and I felt absolutely abandoned. [##] And suddenly here I was going great guns, and I felt, "My goodness, am I ever going to be able to graduate?" And it was very difficult. For instance, I remember--I'm not going to tell you names because some of them still are there. [laughter] For instance, I remember that there was this problem: "Do an exercise to project yourself into the work as though you were a Byzantine, and draw like a Byzantine, paint like a Byzantine." I said, "No, I'll never do it. I would lose my integrity." [laughter] (Here I am a student.) "If I try to be a Byzantine, then I can't be myself." See, I had just learned to be myself, and here they wanted me to be a Byzantine. Now, maybe you could be a Byzantine when you were much older and much more secure, and you'd say, "Well, okay, I'll be a Byzantine for five minutes." [laughter] But to be a Byzantine at a time when you're just awakening to being yourself is absolutely the wrong approach. Don't you agree?

ROGERS: Yes, you're plugging up something that . . .

FALKENSTEIN: . . . that just was undammed. So I wouldn't do it. [##]

ROGERS: Before you leave that, what type of thing were you doing that they objected to so much? Can you describe it at all?



FALKENSTEIN: It was very emotional, and it was very--I think it was still a carry-over from that second year in high school when I saw that Michelangelo, because I think what happened to me at that time became an unconscious drive for individual proportion. I was making my individual proportions, fantastic proportions, and I wasn't abiding by any rules at all. It was just my own sense of what I wanted to do.

ROGERS: Did you work from a model, or did you . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, there was a model there, but that was just a point of departure. I can show you some of the drawings later. I have some here from that time when I was a junior.

ROGERS: Did you use this as a basis of your portfolio for graduation?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't know how I got out, frankly: I got my grades, I got my diploma, and I just left. But . . . I had an exhibition. I made an exhibition. I decided these things I had done were so good, I made my decision, see, right then, that I would have a show. And I got a first-class gallery. A first-class gallery said, "Yes, we'd like to give you a show." In San Francisco--it's the East-West Gallery; I think it still exists. And so they put up all these things.

ROGERS: They were drawings?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and some watercolors, watercolors that





I had done after this year. So out of that came . . .  
This is interesting. During my junior year, when I was going through all of this--oh, I guess it was my sophomore year that I met someone from Texas, a girl from Texas whose mother was a writer. Her name was Carle Wilson Baker. She was a student at the same time I was, and we were in the same class and so on. I met her in my sophomore year, and we were friends all through the sophomore year. Then she went to Mills College, and I stayed on at the university. But we kept our friendship going, and she introduced me to a marvelous woman who was the head of the art department at Mills College, Florence Minard. When I met Florence Minard was when I was a junior in college, when I was doing all these drawings. So Florence Minard became very interested in me and would have me over, and she'd have people in to meet me and see my drawings. It was like nowadays: you have the young talent something-or-other, and people come to look. Well, in a way it was an informal kind of thing like that. So anyway--that's that--anyway. . . .

ROGERS: She had your work there?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I would just come over with a portfolio of work and here were all these people. One of them was Imogen Cunningham (you know Imogen Cunningham?) and Esther Waite (you happen to know Esther?). She was dean of women later at Mills College. Florence Minard was head of the art department. Roi Partridge, who later became my boss,



because I taught at Mills College later. . . . I'm trying to think of some of the people who came in to look at these drawings. But because of this, she became a staunch friend, Florence Minard. And all through the years, she and I have had this going relation.

But when I graduated from the school and was really down in the dumps (because I just got out, that's all), she says, "Well, now, Claire"--by then I had had my show, my exhibition--she said, "Well, now, Claire, you have to do something. You just can't. . . ." I never thought of what I was going to do afterwards; I just thought--I didn't think; I just did work and that's that. She said, "How would you like to teach?" I said, "Well, I never thought about it, but why not?" So I had gone that one year to the Anna Head school, and she said, "Now, why don't you go back there and teach?" So here she wrote to Miss [Elizabeth] Wilson, who was the head of the school, and I had this interview with Miss Wilson. The fact that I had the exhibition was the most impressive thing that Miss Wilson could ever think of, and that I had this recommendation from the head of the art department at Mills College. So I began to teach at Anna Head School.

ROGERS: Your reputation from Berkeley hadn't followed you to Anna Head School?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no, no, no. They didn't know anything about it. All they knew about was the good reputation,



the fact that I had had a show, and the fact that Florence Minard recommended me. So I taught. And that was the first job and the first thing I ever did to earn money. It wasn't very much--I'm not going to tell you how much.

ROGERS: How did you feel that first day when you stood in front of the class?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I had an awfully hard time with the students, because I was so interested in every one of them, you know, and they knew that I was so vulnerable. Boy, would they take advantage of me. But I was teaching English and art, through the grades. Let's see. I taught English--to what grade was that? I think up to the eighth grade, something like that. And then I taught art from primary through the whole thing, through high school. Because Anna Head went from primary through high school, you know--that's the way it was: from the first through the eighth through the ninth through the twelfth grade.

ROGERS: Did you give any thought how you would teach art?

FALKENSTEIN: No. I just learned it as I went along.

ROGERS: You didn't have any theories that you wanted to prove or disprove?

FALKENSTEIN: No, except I had my own idea about what I wanted to do, and then I tried to project that.

ROGERS: And what was that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, I had [gone through] this whole experience of going inside myself and then drawing





and working it out, so I had come out with some philosophy. And the philosophy had a lot to do with exploring one's own potential, giving kind of hints here and there but really letting people alone to do it.

ROGERS: How successful were you at that, at getting them to do it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'll tell you. One of my students is Susan Peterson, who's the head of the ceramics department at USC. And I had some good students, finally; I really had.

ROGERS: Did you find children of that elementary age were more responsive to try new things than perhaps they might be as they got older in high school?

FALKENSTEIN: You know, the most interesting age group for me was the adolescents, the high school students. The little ones really don't need much teaching; I mean, just give them materials and they do it. In fact, I think that the way to teach small children is just let them go mostly, just give them the materials, or maybe you can suggest a story or some kind of an idea around which they can weave, because they are completely visually retinal. I mean retinal in the sense that they want to repeat what they have seen. But the high school students are much more philosophically and abstractly oriented. They can have ideas that they want to express in a symbolic way much more than a youngster, I mean a child. So I found the



high school people--I have a lot of the drawings still  
from these years from the students.



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ROGERS: We were talking about your students at the Anna Head School and your experiences as a young teacher. On the whole, you felt that you were successful in getting your students to respond?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, finally. I mean, I went through a growing, learning period. The first year was pretty hard because I couldn't get any discipline. They just took advantage of me, all the kids did, because I was too sympathetic with everybody. I was just thinking about myself, how I didn't want to be put upon, so I didn't want to put upon them. But suddenly I realized I had to get some kind of discipline there, otherwise we wouldn't do anything. So that first year was a learning period of how to deal with people, how to deal with students.

ROGERS: Did you get any direction or help from anyone?

FALKENSTEIN: Uh-uh. No. [laughter] I just did it. And the second year. And then finally, I was there for seven years.

ROGERS: And all the time you were teaching, were you working on your own, too?

FALKENSTEIN: Always. Working, working, working. Trying and thinking and doing things. And studying music. I





remember I was studying composition. I did some compositions. I was studying piano. I was studying singing. I was thinking that--you know, I had to explore all art. And I did it the way I thought, I mean the way it was possible--which was kind of minimal, I promise you, but something was going on all the time.

And then I finally married. I married a high school sweetheart [Richard McCarthy] in--I guess it was after I'd been teaching there for about six years. And then I taught one year more, and then I quit. But I didn't want to quit teaching. I had a kind of instinctive feeling of wanting my independence; even when I married, I felt, "Well, I have to keep my independence." I mean, it wasn't too clear to me; it was kind of underneath. So I insisted upon--economic independence was a very important thing, that I should pay my way, to a degree anyway, and then I could do what I wanted to do--I suppose that's what I thought. So I started teaching at the University [of California] Extension over in San Francisco. I left Anna Head and went over there. And over there, it was an entirely new experience of working with adults, you know, older people. My God, some of them were, I think--well, from thirty to seventy. I never had really young people, had mostly older people in the extension. And I was there for quite a while. And then I was invited to teach at Mills College, and I taught there for two years. And



then I was invited to teach--oh, in the meantime I taught at the San Francisco Museum of Art. I did some night teaching there. Then I taught at the California School of Fine Arts, which is now the San Francisco Art Institute. And then I thought, "This is finished: I don't want to teach, I want to do." But I was teaching all this time because I had to keep my independence. Finally I left. I went to Paris (that was 1950). So I went to Paris. . . .

ROGERS: Now, before you went to Paris, there must have been some major decision-making here.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and also I felt as though I had explored all the possibilities in San Francisco. [##] And another thing, I wanted to meet the masters. I wanted to see Brancusi, I wanted to meet Arp, and I wanted to get acquainted with Miro and see Picasso. I don't think it's so urgent nowadays as it was in the forties and fifties.

ROGERS: How much exposure in San Francisco did you have to these artists?

FALKENSTEIN: Nothing. Except paintings and reproductions. See, that's the thing: it's a kind of a mystique--it was then, anyway--about the masters, the living masters. I had become acquainted with certain people, like . . .

You see, I started writing, too. I didn't tell you. When I was teaching at Mills College, I was invited to write for Arts and Architecture. So that was a good thing that happened to me, because I then would come down to Los



Angeles and get acquainted with another kind of world. I mean, Los Angeles is a kind of an opening-up from San Francisco. San Francisco and Berkeley were a little bit parochial compared to Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a broader area. You know, with the movies, you had all these people coming in, like Jean Renoir and Schoenberg. You had big architects living here, and so on. We had two or three architects up there, but it wasn't like Los Angeles, even then. I think it's still different, don't you?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: The writing that you did for Arts and Architecture, how did that come about?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, see, as I told you, I was very active in lots of groups. I was active in the San Francisco Art Association, and I was teaching, and I was getting these prizes. And Entenza, John Entenza, who was the editor of the magazine invited me to write.

ROGERS: What kinds of articles did you do?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, what I did was to cover the art scene of Northern California. But probably the best thing I wrote was a symposium on art held at the San Francisco Museum ["Western Round Table"]. It was [Mark] Tobey, Duchamp, Frank Lloyd Wright, that wonderful anthropologist-- I forget his name [Gregory Bateson], [Alfred] Frankenstein, the critic. Anyway, it was this symposium. Then there was





another; there were two symposiums, that one, and then another symposium at the Palace of the Legion of Honor. So I wrote them; I wrote the first one up, and then I wrote the second one up. And these two essays on these symposia were very well received in the magazine, and I was put on the editorial--what is it called?--the editorial staff or editorial board or something. And so when I went to Europe, in 1950, I was still writing for Arts and Architecture. And it sort of opened up things for me. For instance, I went out to see Arp and I wrote an article on him. I went to see Henry Moore, and I wrote an article on him (it was published in Arts and Architecture). [laughter] I really never thought of it as an end in itself at all. I just thought of--I was always thinking of bringing in everything so I could understand more about myself; that's all I was trying to do.

But then that kind of petered out, because as time went on, I stayed. You know, I went over there on a tour and I just didn't come home. So I stayed there pretty much; I mean, although I did make trips back to America, and I would go all over Germany, France, Italy, Spain and so on, I always sort of stayed in France. I'd come to America practically every year until '58, and then I stayed a whole year in '58 in San Francisco.

ROGERS: Let's go back to San Francisco. You talked about covering the art scene in San Francisco in those years.



Can you fill that out a little bit as to what the art scene was? Were they receptive to avant garde? How did they accept Tobey and [Morris] Graves?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I didn't know Tobey much then. In fact, I think I saw one or two pictures of his in the San Francisco museum, and I didn't know him at all. Dr. [Grace McCann] Morley, to my mind, was the most important integer in that period of art. I think she started there in '37. I don't know, when was it that she started being museum director? I don't know. And she left, when did she leave? What was it, '50-something-or-other, because when I came back from Europe the first time, I saw her. And the first time I came back was '55? Yes, she left, I guess, about '58, because then I had a studio in New York and we met in New York before she went to India.\* Do you know anything about Dr. Morley?

ROGERS: No, I don't.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, she was the first museum director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, and she was the one to insist upon a contemporary, really contemporary, attitude. She had gotten her doctorate at the Sorbonne and was also contemporary in the sense of French culture. She got her doctorate at the Sorbonne, and she had this French culture

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\*Morley's tenure with the San Francisco Museum of Art lasted from 1935 through 1958.



ingrained in her. And God, she was just terrific. I don't know what we would have done if we hadn't had Dr. Morley in those early years, because she made it possible through the museum to exhibit. There was nothing else. There weren't any galleries--there were two or three little galleries, but they didn't amount to much. It was the museum. And through the [San Francisco] Art Association, the museum was very active. The art association had the museum and the school, the California School of Fine Arts at that time. And Dr. Morley really--see, it wasn't related to the city. She was on her own; she was independent of the city. It wasn't a county- or city-controlled thing; it was just the San Francisco Museum of Art. That was a group of very learned or cultured people who sort of started it, and they got ahold of her. I don't know how it came about that she was there. But she was invaluable in those early days, because she made it possible for the people, for the artists, to develop by having the possibility of a show.

So I would write about the shows and write about anything that I wanted to write about and send it every month down to Arts and Architecture; I had a deadline, you know, and I did about four pages, wrote about four pages. I remember it was just a hassle to do it because, again, I was teaching myself, you know, how to do it.

ROGERS: Who were you impressed with that you saw exhibited in San Francisco?





FALKENSTEIN: Well, there were quite a few very good artists. I suppose during the period that I was developing, first Charles Howard was highly regarded, and I regarded him highly. He was very much of an influence. Do you know him?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: And somebody at that time who was absolutely strong was--and I don't think . . . Well, I'm not going to say it, but anyway, he was very, very strong--was Lee Mullican. He was very good. Oh, and then there was Clay Spohn. I'm trying to think of some of the ones that I really liked. Adaline Kent. And I'm trying to think--but of course, the one that was the most important, the most important leader in painting, and is still to my mind the most important leader in painting as far as I can see, was Clyfford Still. He came from New York.

\* \* \*

[This portion of the text has been sealed  
at the request of the interviewee.]

\* \* \*

ROGERS: Why are they afraid of him?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, he's an acknowledged master, an American master, really acknowledged by painters. Probably one of the greatest. And he's come to this realization, his statement is so strong, so--how do you say?--evolved, and there aren't very many Americans who've ever done that. And the



students know it. A lot of people don't know it; they don't see it, but it's true. Take my word.

ROGERS: When you were teaching in San Francisco and you were working, too, how did the evolution come from your painting and drawing to sculpture?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you know, even when I was a child in Coos Bay, people would say, "Now, what do you want to do when you grow up?" And I don't know where it came from--it may have been from some of the things I had seen at Shore Acres, or maybe just the coast, the rock formations, or the trees--I don't know, but I said, "I want to be a sculptor." That was when I was a little kid. And as time . . . I drew and all that; it was the easy thing to do. I mean, you just get a piece of paper and you draw. But to do a piece of sculpture, you have to learn. Well, that tree house--I mean, that environment that I did, was three-dimensional and was using textures and using forms and space. That was really a sculptural thing. And I got more kick out of that than ever in my life before and rarely since, when I was doing that, when I accomplished that. So I guess something must--I must have gotten the word someplace that there was such a thing as sculpture; I didn't know exactly what it was, but that's what I wanted to be.

I always felt that way, but I don't think I really got into it until--when? Well, I was in a summer course.



I was given an award, a grant to study with [Alexander] Archipenko at Mills College. This was when I was still a student at the university. So, for the first time I got into clay in a big way--you know, I mean under a master, an artist. And that piece up there is an example of the kind of thing that came out of it. See that head?

[untitled]

ROGERS: The terra-cotta.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, now that goes back to my student days, right there. In this room, there's the history of my life. That's the earliest piece. And then I have some other clay pieces in my bedroom which I'll show you, which were later and more evolved in concept than that. I mean, that is sheer looking and doing with slight variations. But in there, it's creative. I have two pieces, very creative.

[tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: How do you remember Archipenko?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I remember him as a very vulnerable, open, true artist: no pretense, no flamboyance, really giving himself very freely with no ostentation, and just a great guy, marvelous. And then he would stand up before the class--now, this class was in the summer, and it was very hot in Mills College, so everybody was very relaxed. It was just a great, great period for me and for everybody. There were no problems particularly, just working in clay. He would talk once in a while, talk about his





experience and how he came to his form, how he would reject certain things he did and say, "No, that's not it, because that's not really what I want to do," and he would try again. The idea was that it was a continuing kind of exploring of himself. And, of course, to me that was just absolutely true because that's what I'd gone through and was going through. I mean, I had gone through this with my junior year. So he was very sympathetic as far as I was concerned.

ROGERS: The pieces that you did for him, were you able. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: I didn't do anything for him, but I did things. Let's say I got into clay. It was a kind of an environment that was not passionate or like this thing that happened to me when I was a junior, nothing like that, but what it was was a true, living, quiet kind of growing period. It had nothing to do with opening up new avenues or great vistas or anything. But it was like a normal continuing thing with no fraud or fake qualities; it was a true thing.

ROGERS: Earlier you mentioned that you had met Imogen Cunningham. Did you have any further contact with her?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes, all through the years. In fact, just last fall she called me. She was here and wanted to see me, but I couldn't see her because I was on my way, I think--where?--Phoenix or something. I was just leaving, and I couldn't see her, which was a shame, because she died. And then she wanted me to meet her and come see



her in San Francisco. But frankly, Imogen was of a character that I never really could find too much--I mean, she and I did not hit it off. Let's say it that way. Whereas Florence Minard, who was Imogen's great friend, I just loved, and we hit it off very well. So I knew Imogen all right, and I've had wonderful associations with her and her family; for instance, her ex-husband, Roi Partridge, was the head of the department when I taught at Mills. I know the sons; I know her sister. I stayed with her sister one summer up at Northern California where I did a lot of watercolors. Her sister was married to the boss of the woods for the mill up there and his lumber company. So I've had a lot of association with Imogen and, you know, we were friends but not really friends; we were, let's say, friends, but nothing more. More than acquaintances, but not real friends.

ROGERS: Would you say in San Francisco during those years that you were at Mills College and you were teaching that there was an artist community that saw each other often, than stimulated each other?

FALKENSTEIN: No. If there were people who saw each other and stimulated each other, they were people that I didn't even know. I always felt as though I knew people and had friends, but not really close friends, that [I] was always really on the outside and alone--I always felt that. I had friends, but they weren't other artists and they weren't



other sculptors, to the extent that you would have, you know, real buddy-buddy talks about this and that, because usually whenever I would talk to another artist, I didn't agree with them and they didn't agree with me. I never had that real association with another artist that I know of. I'm trying to think. In Europe, I knew artists a little more, but not there either. I think in general artists are pretty much alone, because you have your own thing to do. If you get mixed up with too many other people, you're apt to lose your concentration.

ROGERS: Then it's not necessary for you to have a social life of other artists around you?

FALKENSTEIN: No, absolutely not. [tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: I wanted to ask you about your other interests while you were at Berkeley, because obviously the art was just one of the things that you were very strongly involved in. What else did you study while you were at Berkeley?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I feel that out of my university experience probably the most important happening to me, aside from being awakened to exploring my own inner feelings in my junior year, were the studies of anthropology and philosophy. They were my two minors, and I took courses in them every year; from my freshman year through my senior year I was taking courses in anthropology, for instance. And I feel that anthropology has given me more to sustain





me and keep me whole and keep me sane through trials and tribulations, more than anything else. Because it relates me to the world; it relates me to time. Time, space. . . . And anthropology to me is something that should be a requirement for every single human being, because then it breaks down all kinds of inhibitions and prejudices and opens up ways of doing that aren't just in your immediate areas.

ROGERS: I absolutely agree with you.

FALKENSTEIN: People come up to me and say, "My daughter is going to be an artist. What should she do?" And I say, "Study anthropology." [laughter]

ROGERS: Have the primitive arts had any influence on your work?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, much. Look at that, for instance.

[Fertility]

ROGERS: Oh, yes, very much so.

FALKENSTEIN: I think probably--aside from African, which has only entered my vision or my consciousness peripherally--the most important work that I feel has influenced me is the British Columbian, the Northwest Coast, the Pacific Northwest. But it's not just primitive, you know; I don't even like to use the word "primitive" now.

ROGERS: I'm sorry, I used that phrase myself.

FALKENSTEIN: I think it's a kind of--for instance, I was in the caves at Lascaux before they closed them (you know they're closed now), and for instance, I don't know how



anyone could be more accomplished or more sophisticated or more expressive in telling the life of a vital experience than those tremendous bisons. I don't know, I mean, what's primitive about that? And it's done--what?--10,000 years ago or more (I don't know exactly; I forget).

ROGERS: Your studies in philosophy at Berkeley, did you continue on? Have you kept up that thread in your life?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the only thing I can say is that I'm open and unafraid to tackle difficult texts. Not that I'm able to conquer every one that I tackle, but, you know, reading Jung and Freud and--oh, anything, I'll just tackle anything. But lately I've been reading Shakespeare. I was sick; I had a terrible flu. I thought, "Well, you know, I haven't read Shakespeare for a long time, so I'll get out my volume." I have a complete, total unabridged everything that I bought in Rome; it's an English edition. I started reading Shakespeare, and it's just marvelous--I mean, just to read it, not to study it, not to be under somebody's thumb who says, "You're supposed to think this and that about Shakespeare," but just to read it as a thing of interest, and enjoy.

ROGERS: He's still very contemporary.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and the way he writes, you know. And then when you read some of the criticisms of Shakespeare, how he really wasn't too highly regarded in his own day. . . .



ROGERS: Well, I know you're anxious to go to work in your studio, and your helper is here. Is this a habit that you have, a lifestyle, that you do work in the evening?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. I work on my own, but I have projects going which continue on into the night, and I have a helper who comes twice a week to help.

ROGERS: Well, it's almost six-thirty now, so . . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Only six-thirty? Well, that's not so much. Okay.

ROGERS: So we'll start again the next time.





TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 23, 1976

ROGERS: In reviewing the conversation that we had last week, is there anything that you felt that you had left out that you wanted to add to it, or shall we just continue on?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't remember exactly what I said except something about my youth.

ROGERS: The conversation kind of ended on the note that you had felt you'd done everything you wanted to do in San Francisco and were ready for a larger world. But before we go on to your moving to Europe, let's talk a little bit more about the work that you did between the late 1930s and up to 1950. In addition to that, I wanted to just clear up a few points. For one, you mentioned that you had married, but you didn't mention his name. Would you care to include that in on the record?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. He was a high school sweetheart, and we married soon after I graduated from college. He studied law, so he was just getting into his profession. And I had, of course, graduated and was going on with my work because of this passion for sculpture. I couldn't stop it. I didn't change my name; I kept my maiden name in the work. His name is Richard McCarthy, and he still is a practicing lawyer in Oakland. So I was teaching most



of the time, because I always felt that I wanted to earn my own way, especially as I was concerned with doing what I felt I had to do; therefore, I wanted to be as economically independent as possible. And my teaching was a broadening thing, too, because not only did I teach in the schools, as I did in Anna Head School, but I began teaching and lecturing, teaching in the museum and lecturing around to organizations. It was very good for me because it made me face myself and integrate my ideas and project them. Finally I was writing, and from about '48 or '47, I forget-- I think about '47--I began writing for Arts and Architecture. I was the Northern California correspondent to the magazine, which was published here in Los Angeles.

ROGERS: I did a little research on some of those articles. In one of them you mentioned that you were a delegate to UNESCO when the United Nations meetings were held on May 13, 14, and 15 in 1948. Do you remember going to that and hearing Margaret Mead?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes I do. But I'd forgotten it was for UNESCO. I remember hearing her and Dr. Morley. I still keep hearing about Dr. Morley. Did I then do a report to Arts and Architecture?

ROGERS: Yes. You gave a very brief synopsis of Margaret Mead's philosophies on peace and war, and that each one is personally responsible for maintaining or establishing peace. Do you remember anything more about that?



FALKENSTEIN: No. [laughter] It was so long ago; so much has happened. But that wasn't the one I remembered so much. What I remember was the--I think it was called the Western Art Round Table; that I remember, and that's the one I told you about, with Tobey and Duchamp and [Bateson] (he was the husband for a while of Margaret Mead, both anthropologists). And who else?

ROGERS: Frank Lloyd Wright.

FALKENSTEIN: Frank Lloyd Wright, Frankenstein, and Tobey. That round table was very interesting.

ROGERS: What did they discuss?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, how can I remember just now? I just remember some of the remarks. For instance, I remember that Frank Lloyd Wright got up and said--oh, I think part of the title was "Art for the Common Man," or something--he got up and said there was no such thing as a common man, that every man was uncommon. And then Tobey said something about a criticism of his work, that it looked like torn-off billboards. And he said, "I began looking at them, and I thought they were very beautiful." Duchamp was very cold; as I remember, he read his speech, and I do not remember a thing he said. And Frankenstein also--I don't remember anything about him. I think it was Bateson who spoke about the pleasure principle in art and said, "If we don't have pleasure, why have art?" That's all I remember. I'd have to read over again what I said. I don't know. Where did you get those articles?



ROGERS: They had them in the UCLA main library.

FALKENSTEIN: Really?

ROGERS: Yes, they had the architectural magazines going all the way back to the late thirties.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, when did I start writing?

ROGERS: In 1947, '48 and '49.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. And then I sent some back from Europe.

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, 1947, '48, '49. That's interesting.

Now I know.

ROGERS: Going back even earlier than that, though, you were working at your art while you were in high school and while you were in college. Did you have a studio in your home?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I never had a studio, really, until we bought a house on a hill in Berkeley up above the cyclotron.

ROGERS: This is your family or your. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: No, when I was married. I never had a studio before that. And it was a very bad studio. It was under the deck. See, there was an outside deck, and the house went down the hill; therefore, it was just like a platform out, and the roof of my studio was the deck of the house. How big was it? It wasn't very big, about half as big as this room, I guess. But it was something, and it was somewhere that I could go in and leave things and do things. I did quite a lot of my work there. I did all these wood pieces [Classic Piece, Gravity, Rotation],





and the clay. No, that clay was earlier, but that wood piece over there [Drift] was done there, and this wood piece--all the wood pieces, and a lot of paintings that I still have. I exhibited in the Metropolitan, one of them [Steel Workers], and did quite a few exhibits.

ROGERS: It must have been a pretty well equipped studio, because you needed . . .

FALKENSTEIN: It was not equipped at all. It was like scratching things out with my elbows.

ROGERS: You didn't use power tools for most of the pieces?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had to go someplace else to do that. I didn't have power tools to do that.

ROGERS: How did a young woman who had never had any past experience with tools approach a power tool?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's easy if you just have guidance. I mean, you just don't go to it without guidance; you have to have some kind of a teacher. This has been the story of my life. I've never gone to school really to learn to be anything. I've just had ideas, and when I wanted to carry them out, I would go to a craftsman and get some teaching on the subject. I never have gone through any kind of curriculum, ever. So when I wanted to do these and I knew what I wanted to do, I went to a craftsman and had some guidance and learned how to do it, then rented space and did it.

ROGERS: Let's go into that a little bit more. You said



you knew what you wanted to do, and that's with these pieces which were only one of a kind. You never repeated this series again. This is Set Rotation?

FALKENSTEIN: That's right. Set structures. Yes.

ROGERS: How did . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the idea was that--now, how long ago was that? In '42, '41, because I really started in '41 with the idea of breaking up the volume--the idea (I guess you've gotten it by this time), the whole idea of my work is a suggestion of 'nothing.' I mean, the whole thing exists within total space, all, us, everything. And when I do a work, I consider myself an extension of nature. So if I extend myself in nature, I will . . . I wasn't so much conscious of it at that time; I had to come to this consciousness little by little, because what I wanted to do there was just an urge to break up the volume. See, that's broken, and to my knowledge I am the first to have ever done it. Right now, it's in the groove--you do that--but I did that out of a need. It wasn't out of taking a technique and just doing it, or taking a way and just carrying out a lot of things. But this came out of a need to break the volume, to integrate that material as a kind of force for integration in the total space. It was just an urge, and I didn't know what I was doing exactly except I had to do it, and the same way here. But within that I felt an expression coming through of



different kinds of motion. See, that's the motion of sliding. This is gravity.

ROGERS: Now, when you say this is gravity, that's the one that you entitled Gravity.

FALKENSTEIN: That's this one. That's upside down, by the way. Now this is Sliding. You see how it slides?

ROGERS: Yes. It extends itself into space, and yet it's still. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: By sliding. So these wood pieces are not only, only examples of volumes which have been opened up, but they're also volumes in a state of motion, that is, potential motion, but requiring a human agent to set it in motion. So it's like audience participation.

ROGERS: You claimed you only wanted to do it once. According to this catalog, you said that it was done, and you would never make another set, and there was no further need for you to explore.

FALKENSTEIN: At that time. You see, this is a kind of-- now, there's a kind of attitude in merchandising. I mean, I feel that now the whole world has been turned upside down by merchandising--not only of things and everyday products, but art, too, has come under the spell, let's say. The whole thing is becoming very commercial, and you think in terms of repetition and repetition and repetition, putting it out and treating it like a commodity. But you see, this isn't. This is not a commodity. This is like a philosophic





statement. It has nothing to do. . . . And for instance, I would never sell these.

ROGERS: Let's explore or walk through just the technique of doing something like this. You have an idea. Do you begin by sketching it? Do you begin by exploring what kind of wood you're going to use?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I tell you, I do drawings all the time, and I do drawings of ideas. I have lots of books with drawings in them, many drawings, and when you have a video tape, you can tape some if you want. But that doesn't mean I'll copy my drawings. It means that the drawing sets the thing in motion; and then, when I get to the material, it's as though I come freshly with an idea, and I work it out as I feel the material needs to have it work out. Because if it's worked out in wood, not only do you have to consider the grain, you have to consider the shape, the size, everything. And it doesn't matter what your idea is before as a preconception; you're still faced with a material substance which has to participate with you. It's not you imposing an idea upon the substance; it's the two working together.

ROGERS: Isn't this what Frank Lloyd Wright called the truth in materials?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't know what he calls it, but I think that anybody who has any sense at all, as an artist, would feel this way. I can't imagine a true artist just imposing his true idea upon a material, no matter what.



I mean, just plunk it down, and if it's plastic, or metal, or wood, or whatever, just carry it through without any feeling for the material--I can't imagine that.

ROGERS: When you picked your wood, how did you decide what you would. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, a lot of it was by chance. It was what I could find, what I could get. Now, if I could get a 4-inch plank of mahogany, 14 inches wide, and 24, 30 inches long, I just felt that was a very good piece of wood, and I would buy it and study it and work on it; and in the meantime, all my ideas were germinating, and that's what came out of it. When I got a piece of walnut, which was, what? 4 x 4--that's 4 inches wide, 4 inches thick (4 inches deep), and about 6 feet high. . . . So it was a combination of the material, the shape, the size, the grain. For instance, that grain is very dense. I could never do in mahogany what I did in walnut. Do you know that? See, that's walnut [Gravity], a very dense grain. But that's mahogany [Rotation], an open grain (it's almost softwood). And there, those large cuts could be made, but this is a very tight cut here. So you see how you have to work with the material.

ROGERS: Now, you bought the wood, and you say you rented a space?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I didn't rent the space, but I had the possibility of a craftsman to work with me on this; so it



was like paying him and paying for the space and working with him (I mean, him helping me to carry through these things).

ROGERS: How much time would you say would be involved from the beginning of the germination of the idea to the finished piece?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think I worked on these wood pieces . . . As I say, the Guggenheim has two, there are two in Paris--let's see, that's four; five, six, seven--and there are about two or three other small ones, and there's one in New York. Say about, all in all, about ten pieces. And I think it was over a period of two years.

ROGERS: Which is the one you made first? Do you remember?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know. I was working on them all kind of simultaneously, but I think I finished that [Sliding] one first. I'm not sure, but I think I finished that one first, because it was such a natural and a very straightforward use of the material and not too difficult to finish those big areas for sanding. See, there's a lot of sanding and finishing on that, and I did it all myself. Oh, and then I did another huge one; I did a great big one on commission, a table for Ellen Bransten. She is now dead, but her husband [Joseph] still lives, and they have the table in San Francisco--it's the MJB coffee people. That's one of my first commissions to do that table, and that came out of this idea, see. And I did it--it's a great big



table which moved, and then I put a slab of glass on top.

ROGERS: How did she happen to know you were doing these?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was very active in San Francisco and she was a collector. As a matter of fact, this got the first prize in an exhibition in about '43 or '44, and it said something, "a new idea." I think I have the catalog someplace. It was the [San Francisco] Art Association show.

ROGERS: It doesn't have a name. I would like to establish for the benefit of the transcript, it just says Classic Piece.

FALKENSTEIN: That's it. That's the title.

ROGERS: Is this what it looks like when it's closed, then?

FALKENSTEIN: Uh-huh.

ROGERS: I see. These are both the same piece then. The one that you have up on your bookcase has a piece--is that center piece separate from the oval set? Is that attached somehow and moves? Is it connected?

FALKENSTEIN: No. None of these are attached. It's all free.

ROGERS: I see.

FALKENSTEIN: And you see, each one--now, for instance, this is Sliding, that's Gravity, and this is Rotation. And all the elements in it rotate. There are only three elements, but each one has a possibility of moving around.

ROGERS: Each one of the ten does it in a different way.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, except in the pieces in New York, in





the Guggenheim and in this private collection. They're all based on the cylinder, but it's the cylinder used each time in a different way. So it isn't just a cylinder holding pieces together, but sometimes the cylinders interlock and so on. I think I have some photographs of some of these, I'm not sure.

ROGERS: What did you, shall we say, learn from having finished the ten pieces?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I took these ten pieces--not ten, not all of them; I took about six pieces with me to New York in '44 and showed them to the people at the Museum of Modern Art, and they wouldn't look at them for dust. They were not interested at all. But a private gallery--two galleries wanted to show me with them, but one gallery, the best gallery, wanted to wait two years. But it was during the war, and I didn't know what was going to happen (I mean, whether I'd ever get back to New York again, or when). And here this other gallery [the Bonestell Gallery], which was not a very important gallery, wanted to offer me to show and make a catalog. So I accepted. And probably that was a mistake, in a way, because I--no, it wasn't; it was good, because with it I had a lot of experiences in New York which were very beneficial. And if I just simply waited I wouldn't have had these experiences. Maybe it would have been better in the long run professionally to have had a gallery that would continue, but



I'm not so sure I'd be interested in being in that gallery now. I'm not going to mention the gallery.

ROGERS: Is this the first time that you showed that far east?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure. But I'll never forget how in the Museum of Modern Art, how they absolutely practically laughed me out when I showed them these pieces.

ROGERS: Who did you go to see there? Did you walk right in to the director's office?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I had an introduction to Dorothy Miller. You know, it's very funny, because since then--I mean, evidently the idea was ready, and I happened to hit on it like that. But since then, it's just part of the vocabulary of sculpture. But nothing had been seen like it before.

ROGERS: Let's discuss the ceramic pieces that you did where you were examining and using ceramic to encompass space and volume and enclose it. This Labyrinth. There are several pieces throughout these years that resemble each other, are not alike but nevertheless have a certain basic form. The examination of using ceramic in such a mobile way, that was very new at that time, wasn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's now called slab construction. Again, I didn't know what I was doing except I was using the medium in the way I thought it should be used. I was also expressing myself, probably relating myself to some inner need, again, for motion. See, this is really a very



moving kind of interrelated group of volumes, I mean of open spaces and closed spaces and so on. And again, slab construction is just an everyday thing now.

ROGERS: The futurists, the Italian futurists added a new dimension to sculpture and to painting. Did you feel that you had an affinity with them?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I do now. I see a lot of connection with [Umberto] Boccioni. For instance, this is very simple and straightforward compared with Boccioni. Boccioni is much more elaborated. And also he relates himself to a visual image, whereas this is free. There's no visual image. There's no relationship to anything except my inner feeling as a form. Boccioni uses topological form, obviously, but relates it to a human figure, which this isn't. But it's close in the formal attitudes.

ROGERS: You used the term topology in the other recording. Could you kind of define it and elaborate on it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, topology to me is a contemporary attitude towards describing space, as opposed to geometry. Geometry seems to hold the world--I think it was David Smith that sort of pointed everybody that way in his last work. If he had lived, I don't think he would have ended up as a geometrist; [but] he died in an accident, and he died in this particular vein in his work, [and this has been] a very great hardship, I think, for American art. [##] It relates to Euclidian geometry. It relates to the





Renaissance and the use of geometry and perspective and the whole idea of the rectilinear world of how to measure space. But I feel that topology is more related to probability and continuum and our whole attitude toward the Einsteinian space. And that is curved space, for God's sake. So I had been working in this way intuitively from the beginning. That is topological right there, but without any kind of consciousness of doing it.

ROGERS: This is Inside Outside, made in 1939.

FALKENSTEIN: There you are. That's right. And I've never given it up. I have used, let's say, for certain purposes, because the material demanded it . . . Now like this-- this goes into more of a geometric attitude. But the fact that again it opens up and you have the interstices, I feel that it is topological there, because you do go into the volume.

ROGERS: The events that occurred in your early childhood, we didn't get many dates on them. Dates aren't really all that important, but when did you graduate from Berkeley? What class were you in Berkeley?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I hate to bring up all these dates. Why do you want to know that? It was 1930.

ROGERS: Well, only because I was trying to relate what kind of work you were doing at what point.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I wasn't doing anything except school-work at that time. I mean, I was awakened, let's say, in



college and in school. But to me the big beginning of-- probably my most creative beginning was with the wood pieces.

ROGERS: This would be in '41, '42.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: This particular catalog that we're looking at mentions that you lost your parents at the age of eighteen. Is that true?

FALKENSTEIN: No, that's wrong. That's why Henry Seldis made me an orphan. [laughter] I lost my mother when I was twenty, and I lost my father about ten years later. Or I guess I was twenty-one, because I was a year out of the university when I lost my mother. And my father lived on ten years later. But by then I was teaching and, you know, on my own.

ROGERS: Because you went right into teaching at the Anna Head School when you graduated from Berkeley.

FALKENSTEIN: That was Florence Minard. I spoke about her earlier.

ROGERS: Yes. One of the architectural digests, Arts and Architecture, had an article about you and wallpaper that you had designed. I'd like to discuss with you a little bit about your theory of decorating walls, because you did the murals at the San Leandro naval hospital, too, didn't you?

FALKENSTEIN: God. Jesus. It's one of these things you'd



like to forget, you know. That was during the war, the naval hospital. I mean, I did all those murals during the war as my war work. I learned a lot from it, though. I won't say that I didn't. I don't think they are my greatest work by any means, but to face. . . . I think the San Leandro murals, for instance--there were two 80-foot walls, 10 feet high, wasn't it?--I guess. Well, anyway, they probably were 10 x 90 feet, and then there were two smaller walls, 10 x 10 feet. So just to be able to face a wall and do it and carry it off was something. If nothing else, it was character-building. [laughter]

ROGERS: How did they come about? Had you offered or something?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was president of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists in San Francisco, and that was during the war. So I organized the whole Society of Women Artists (I don't know how many; I think there were about 300 women artists), and as artists, as women artists, we did all kinds of volunteer work as artists. I got everybody working, doing this and doing that and teaching in the hospitals and doing charts and doing camouflage, all kinds of things, during the war. And then when everybody was busy, then I decided, "Well, I'll do some murals." So I did some murals in the British barracks and down in the Cow Palace, which was a training center, and over at Letterman Hospital, and then finally the big job. I mean,



I was leading up to the big job, and this big job kept me for about a year and a half, doing it. I don't think they're so bad. They look pretty good.

ROGERS: I like the one that was called The Acropolis Shuffle. Do you remember that one?

FALKENSTEIN: No. [laughter] Oh, that was the end. Part of the developing of the . . . See, the walls of the hospital, these two long walls, I said one wall will be the developing from the beginning, from nothing to man, say, material development. So it was quite interesting. Everybody was talking about them. It was the psychoneurotic hospital, and all these people, all the boys would come in. And it was really up their alley, 'cause they really wanted to talk about something and to be concerned about cultural things. They really wanted that, to get themselves out of whatever they were in. So the murals served the purpose.

ROGERS: These were done in 1948, so the war was . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No. In '43, '44, '45. I finished it in '45.  
[tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: I turned off the tape recorder because it seemed to be malfunctioning, but it's all right, so we'll continue on with what we were talking about. We established that the murals at the San Leandro naval hospital were done in . . .

FALKENSTEIN: They were finished in '45.

ROGERS: . . . in '45. All right. They appeared in





Architectural Forum magazine in September of '46, and that's where the illustration was of you standing on a ladder. The wallpaper that you did, I was interested in discussing that because of the theory that . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Have you seen it?

ROGERS: I saw the design that used the meandering line. You called it Vertebrate Mass.

FALKENSTEIN: For God's sakes, where did you see that? Honestly. [laughter]

ROGERS: I was interested in talking about it. The theory of decorating an upright wall: you said that it established it as a wall and held it up as a wall.

FALKENSTEIN: Did I say that?

ROGERS: I didn't quite understand what you meant by that.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'll tell you what: In San Francisco there was this man, James Kemble Mills; he was a decorator and he commissioned twelve artists of San Francisco. . . . He was a decorator, an individual independent producer--wallpaper or anything, I don't know what else he produced. Anyway, he actually went out to get artists, but along with artists, he tried to mix certain others, like decorative artists. And finally there was the international competition for the American Institute of Interior Designers awards, and one of the awards was for wallcovering. So he chose the ones out of the twelve, and I think he sent back three to this competition. It was at the Museum of Modern Art.



And he didn't choose me. So I independently made my own presentation and sent it back independently. And I won the international prize. He was dumbfounded. Does it say that in what you read?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I got the international prize. So then the San Francisco museum had a competition. Well, they didn't have a competition; they had an invitational. They invited, again, around twelve or eight artists in the community, and so I did it again. Then Fuller Paints invited twelve artists or eight artists, and I was on it again. And I thought, "Well, I'm not going to be a wallpaper designer," and I said, "No more, that's it." But each one of those wallpapers has quite a history: I mean, each one of them was a very interesting experience for me, and the results were interesting. And I learned. I mean, this again, even though it was for application and it wasn't a free kind of exploration of ideas in space (it was for a wall), still I learned something about continuity, of continuing, of infinity. And that's what I meant about this Vertebrate Mass: it was a continuing kind of linear thing that was so simple. It was a pale kind of grey-pink on a charcoal grey; that's all it was, but it defined, very sort of freely, all these animals. I don't know. I did several, and that's the one I chose to send, and it got the prize. First international prize I ever won.



ROGERS: That was in '48?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, that was '48.

ROGERS: So you're beginning to establish yourself internationally now in the late forties.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I also was showing in Paris at that time. At the Realités Nouvelles, I was showing sculpture. I was shown in three Realités Nouvelles. I think they happened every year--they may have happened every other year. But this time when I was in Europe, just now, I brought back catalogs. I didn't know I'd been in three of them. Oh, no--I was in two in the forties and one in the fifties, 'cause after I got to Paris I did something and showed it. So it was really one time in the fifties and two times in the forties.

ROGERS: From what you say, you actively acted as your own agent sometimes, didn't you?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had no agent. And in San Francisco there were no such things as agents, except sometimes there would be an enthusiastic person, like this man getting twelve artists together or something like that. But that was just like a businessman going out and getting somebody to do some work for you. And then, you know, this wall-paper, because I won the international prize, was put in MIT and all over the place. He sold, you know, scads of it. He was supposed to give us all 5 percent commissions. And the whole thing, as far as that work is concerned, it





was just one big experience. I had no monetary gain in it at all--that prize--just lots of publicity and parties and things.

ROGERS: In New York?

FALKENSTEIN: Here, because the A.I.D. presented it. What they did was that they had two or three presentations, but they didn't want to ship people there. I guess they just went around the country. And I remember I had to come down to Los Angeles to get my award. So evidently they had one here, a presentation, one in New York, and so on. But the prize decision was in New York, at the Museum of Modern Art.

ROGERS: What did they give you? A trophy or medal?

FALKENSTEIN: They gave me a document, and I don't know where it is, because a lot of things were burnt up and a lot of things were destroyed when I went away, when I went to Europe. 'Cause I just left everything, and when the house was cleaned out, some people just cleaned it out.

ROGERS: Let's continue on with after you did the Set Rotation and you completed your tenth piece: you moved on to working in bronze and copper.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's kind of interesting, because from this machine sculpture--that's a band saw, you know; this is all done by band saw--I went into hand sculpture of wood with chisels. I had done a little bit of wood sculpture before with hand tools, but not much. And now I went into it very strongly. And then when I got to Europe, I continued



and did these pieces, these big pieces in Europe.

ROGERS: We have a picture here of Interpenetration which is a wood--it looks like an assemblage.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that's one cut out again. Again, this was a completely new idea of not making a rectangle but doing a shape for a wall piece. I mean, this is wood, but shaped, which is another new idea. See, that's '44 and '45. And then I would paint on it. That's flat.

ROGERS: I see. It looks like it's set outside.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's set on my deck outside just to take the picture.

ROGERS: How big a piece was that?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, about 36 by, let's see, about 40 inches, by 40 inches, and the plywood is about an inch thick--no, 3/4-inch plywood.

ROGERS: The Aerial piece--that was done as a metal painting in . . .

FALKENSTEIN: . . . in '47. Yes. I painted on aluminum. It's painted on aluminum, and I curved the surface like that. I did an awful lot of experimenting at that time.

ROGERS: Aluminum was a new medium at that time.

FALKENSTEIN: No one to my knowledge was painting on aluminum--nobody. I still have that piece. I have this one [Flight], too, in storage, both those pieces.

ROGERS: How did you obtain large sheets of aluminum like that?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think I got those through war surplus, spring aluminum.

ROGERS: What kind of tools did you have to work with that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's painted, and I used the spray, spray can. No, I didn't use a spray can; I used a compressor, because I had a compressor. I sprayed it on. This isn't cut. This is just a rectangle, but I put it in a frame that curved it. It was put into a curved shape.

ROGERS: How did it take the paint?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you have to start with zinc chromate-- I learned this--zinc chromate, which is a base paint. Then you can--well, of course this is all lacquer. This is lacquer, too. I was using lacquers with my compressor on these, both of these.

ROGERS: When you say you have to learn this, did you have some advice from someone?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I went to the store and I said, "Look, I'm painting on aluminum. Please tell me how I should do it." And they said, "Well, first you got to put zinc chromate, which is your base paint, and then you can paint your other colors on top of that."

ROGERS: This is your standard procedure then. You just decide you're going to do something and you go around and find someone that tells you how to do it.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right. I think it's the best way, except some people have to go to school and go to school.



But I never--I always felt as though in school I was being, in general (this is in general) I was being put into something that I didn't want to do. See, these things I wanted to do, and therefore I just had to find my way how to do them. And that's been sort of the way I built up my vocabulary in working with materials, and my vocabulary of form, because it has to do with expressions and what you want to say.





TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 23, 1976

ROGERS: When we just were discussing not having a dealer or not having an agent in those days, how you had to get out and hustle for yourself, enter your own contests and arrange your own shows, carry your own pieces to the museum, it reminded me of something you said about Clyfford Still: that he seemed to have a good sense of business and what an artist should do to survive.

FALKENSTEIN: He would not like to hear you say that. He would not like to hear the word business come in the same breath with him as a creator and as a painter. In fact, business in general is something which is kind of an anathema with artists, I mean real artists.

ROGERS: Let me rephrase. Your words were, "He knows how to behave in relation to his career."

FALKENSTEIN: That's different, much different. Because he behaves in a way to put the work on the highest plane of sensibility, and that's the reason that he's in a battle most of the time with business. [##] But I feel that in spite of what he says, he's probably one of the most sought after by the establishment. I don't know whether he consciously or unconsciously put himself in this position to be so sought after. And he accepts sometimes to be part of the Establishment. For instance, he gave all these paintings--



how many? I don't know; I've forgot, or I never heard--to the San Francisco museum. You've heard about that. And the reason he did--well, it's the same old thing: he did it for posterity. He did it so they would be housed and shown and taken care of for posterity. But see, it's not the same. When you have come to the point that he has come to of realization of his ideas and being able to project them the way he has, well, maybe by then you can participate. But I suppose you know that he would not accept to be America's representative at this last Biennale. He refused. [portion of tape erased] In spite of all of his rejection and his real battle against all of this group, he's the most highly regarded painter in America. Which is a most amazing thing. I mean, whether it was a game--I don't think it was a game, I think he did it because he felt that way, but it almost acts like a game of, the right kind of game to play for acceptance.

ROGERS: To be inaccessible?

FALKENSTEIN: To be inaccessible. But I don't believe in that. I think that--I mean, I sort of forgive everybody. [###] Picasso is an example of playing with all of the means and dominating them and really being The One to call the shots for quite a few years. Don't worry. A lot of people are making millions of dollars out of art. Art is big business.

ROGERS: But is it the artist who's getting the money?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the artist, in general, is not; but



some artists are. They know how to handle it. They're very good businessmen, -women, and they know how to handle it. Other artists are just doing the things that they love doing most and thankful that they're able to do it. I am, for instance. I'm just thankful that I can carry on.

ROGERS: You mentioned that you were head of the Society of Women Artists in San Francisco, and that there were 300 women who were working. That's a lot of women to be involved in art. How many of them were really accepted in the . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there were a lot of very unprofessional, Sunday painters, that sort of thing, but there were some very good ones, too. One of the very best women artists at that time did not belong, and her name was Adaline Kent. She wouldn't have anything to do with the women artists. She didn't want to be associated with women artists.

ROGERS: She was a sculpturist, too, wasn't she?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. She's dead; she died. Very unhappy accident. She wasn't really finished at all. In a way, she was just kind of getting started. She was older, but she had to go through quite a lot to really find herself. It was really a tragic thing when she died.

ROGERS: In the area of winning prizes and having their own shows and being exhibited at the museum, were women in a good position in San Francisco?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, as I remember it, there weren't too





many top-ranking women who were out there getting prizes. But there were a few, and there were a few in the Society of Women Artists who were really first-rate. I remember Imogen Cunningham. See, we had all these categories in the society, like for photography, and for bookbinding, or I guess it was called decorative arts or something (it might be bookbinding and all the things like flatware). It was a terrific organization, as I remember it. And I had no qualms at all. I didn't understand what Adaline Kent was talking about not wanting to be with the women. Course, right now, it would be interesting to hear some of these objections, you see. They wanted to be with both men and women. But now women gang up, and it was for the same reason. Then, many women never got a chance to exhibit because they were screened out by the men. It wasn't, they felt, [because of] quality that they were screened out. And with a women's group they had a chance to show. It's the same way now, all the women groups. They say, "Look, we have to band together in order to get a chance for ourselves as women."

ROGERS: When they would judge a show, was there any way they could keep their names off of pieces and just judge by number?

FALKENSTEIN: No. Have you ever been on a jury?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: There is no way of not knowing. I mean,



the signature, the label. If they don't know, they get up and they look around in the back to see.

ROGERS: That must influence their judgment?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure. Absolutely.

ROGERS: You had an opportunity to observe the quality of art education both as a student and as a teacher in the San Francisco area and the Bay Area in the thirties and forties. How would you sum it up? Was it traditional, turning out pretty much academy-type work? Was there a vanguard that was strong enough to be seen and heard?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I believe now, as I believed then, that it's a very individual thing, an inspirational thing, and the student has to be touched. The individual has to be touched by another individual. I don't think a curriculum can touch you. You've got to have that human contact. And once in a while, through a person's life, they would come across someone who really touches them.

ROGERS: You mentioned the teacher who came from France and taught you in your junior year when you exploded, as you put it, but you didn't give us his name. Do you remember what it was?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't mind saying it because he deserves credit, although I don't think you've ever heard of him or ever will hear of him, because I don't think anything has happened to him. I haven't heard anything. His name was George Lusk. [##] But there were two or three



students who were very touched by him. I'm trying to think of these others. Well, no, there were more than two or three: there were about ten who really got something out of his teaching that was very unique. But he just seemed to--he was put out, and he went back East, and I just lost track of him. He was from Chicago. He was a Czech, a Czechoslovakian.

ROGERS: Were Worth Rider and Stephen Pepper at the university while you were there?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. Stephen Pepper was my teacher, and Worth Rider was, too. I don't have too much good to say about Worth Rider, but Stephen Pepper was very interesting. Worth Rider was like the center of a cult. [laughter] I guess I have a tremendous sense of humor, and I always had a sense of humor--that's what's kept me going. [##]

ROGERS: Well, at the time you were there, it was fairly new. I think the Department of Art had been [separately] established for only four or five years when you were first there.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no; oh, no. What?

ROGERS: Yes, it was under the Department of Architecture until 1923.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, really? Well it was very well established when I was there.

ROGERS: When you began your work in slab ceramics and working with the wood, did it come from any type of an



architectural interest, or when did architecture begin to enter?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think this whole thing came about gradually through working with different materials. It had nothing to do with--no sense of a bigger idea of total environment or architectural consideration. Nothing like that. That didn't come until later. For instance, when I did that one architectural thing, that total thing for the Oakland garden show--did I tell you about that?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, my gosh. I guess that was around '47. See, I was teaching then at Mills College and also University Extension over in San Francisco in '47, and one of my students was a landscape architect [Kathryn Imlay]. I have to give her credit for this. I hadn't thought about it before because that was really my first brush with organizing a total space, a whole interior space, except for that little house I did when I was a child. But that was related to something visual and something close to repeating what you would like to live in or something, and it didn't have the abstract notion--I mean, I was too young for that--but this did. This Oakland garden show--I don't know if it still goes on now, but every year they would have this marvelous Oakland garden show [actually called The Oakland Flower Show], and it was in the auditorium. Do you know the Oakland auditorium?





ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: Huge. So they would make little separations and you would enter in competition to make a space in different ways for--what would you say?--I mean there were different kinds of categories. Well, ours was like a court garden, an interior garden. That was our category.

ROGERS: Like an atrium?

FALKENSTEIN: I guess it would have to be, because I did a sculpture. Here it is. Where is it?

ROGERS: Which book is it in? [Claire Falkenstein, Fresno Arts Center (1969)]

FALKENSTEIN: There. Now this is a big ten-foot sculpture I did.

ROGERS: It's called Rotater.

FALKENSTEIN: No, that was given to it. It was for transparency and reflection. No, when you have a mirror, what is that called?

ROGERS: Reflection.

FALKENSTEIN: Not reflection. That's something else, isn't it? All right, we'll call it transparency and reflection. And what I did was a big structure. And I put mirrors in it or had it opened. This is very closely related to my St. Basil [Church] windows done just recently. But this is the same system. It's a three-dimensional. . . .

ROGERS: And this is at least twenty years earlier, in 1947.



FALKENSTEIN: Yes, yes, it is. So I did that. But this was a whole space, and it's too bad we don't have the whole space, because [this picture] doesn't really give you too much an idea. But this was a suspended sculpture which would mirror the garden and give it back to you. And it's what moved; it rotated. That's why it's called Rotater; that's the reason it rotated. Well, I did the sculpture, and what I did was, I designed the whole space. It was done all in angles, and I made a dam for a pool, and then I did this, and then I organized everything. Well, this is the first time I really thought in terms of everything, and that was in '47. That's interesting. Yes, I thought it was '47.

ROGERS: When you say it moved, did it just move from the air currents? Was it suspended there on a single . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. Anyway, we got second prize. We didn't get first prize. She did the garden, and, you know, it was very funny. See, I'd never, never thought of ever doing anything like that. So she, who was going to school (she was going then to the university and studying landscape architecture), she was to get the plant material, and I organized the space. "Now, you put that there, you get a tree here, and you put this here; and I will do the sculpture, I will do the suspended piece, I will make a pool, and so on." She says, "Now, Claire, will it work?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, but I'm going to try." And



she says, "Well, that isn't the way we do it at school; we know whether it will work." Well, mine worked beautifully, and her tree died. I think everything she put in, something happened to it; and that's the reason we got second prize, because all the plants didn't work. Well, I never told her. I didn't say anything to her; I just thought to myself.

ROGERS: You hadn't thought of doing any fountains by that time, did you?

FALKENSTEIN: No. The first I thought of doing a fountain was in '55. That's a little ahead in time.

ROGERS: Yes. We'll try to work just a little bit chronologically here, because it helps to show the development of your work in exploring new techniques. The use of small wire for jewelry and small sculpture came in around about the same time that you were doing the murals in the naval hospital.

FALKENSTEIN: In '45, '46, '47, '48 is when I started jewelry.

ROGERS: What prompted you well into that direction?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was learning to weld, by the way. I wanted to weld, so I learned to weld.

ROGERS: How did you learn to weld?

FALKENSTEIN: I just got a craftsman to teach me. I just went there and was taught. This was the first metal piece I ever did, right there. That's the first one. And I





still have that, by the way.

ROGERS: It's called Game. It's a polychrome iron wire?

FALKENSTEIN: Not wire, it's wrought iron, strip metal.

ROGERS: How did you bend them?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I began to work with fire. I never worked with fire before. Up to that time, I'd worked with a saw, I'd worked with a chisel, I'd worked with clay, but I'd never worked with fire. And then I began working with fire. This is bent by heating and bending, you know, red-hot and bending. So I got into fire and into metal, and that was it.

ROGERS: You worked at a forge?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. For that. And then I got into welding immediately.

ROGERS: Did you hurt yourself?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was always burning myself, but not much. I've had a lot of fires in the studio, though. I almost burnt Rome down once. [laughter] I almost burnt Paris down once. I've never had a fire here. But I've had fires all over in little studios where I kick over the alcohol lamp, or if I was working with a torch, you know, one of those alcohol torches, light a match or something, and then the whole thing would blow up. Ah! But I always put them out--I never got panicky. One time, in Rome, I put my bed on it: I took the mattress off and put it down on it. And here--oh, I did have a



fire here, the Christmas tree. There's a spot on the ceiling there--it was going right up to the ceiling. And all I did was just, you know, put it out.

ROGERS: So, you were taught to weld by a craftsman at his facilities, and he also taught you to use the forge, and you made this first rod construction. It looks like it's about four or five feet high.

FALKENSTEIN: No, it's about twelve inches high.

ROGERS: Oh, it's very small.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, it's about a foot by a foot.

ROGERS: And here you were, you're containing volume and extending volume.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right. What year is that, '44? See, I couldn't have done that if I hadn't have done that.

ROGERS: The wood piece?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. And this is interesting. Now this again is unconscious, but I was using the sign and didn't know what I was doing--because the sign now is probably one of the most important things to me.

ROGERS: Would you explain that to me?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, now, look. This is . . .

ROGERS: . . . Sign in Red.

FALKENSTEIN: Now, this is plastic. I was doing laminated plastics in '46, '47, '48, exploring all kinds of treatments. This happens to be embedding metal in plastic. I was using a repetitive kind of linear formation, see, and



not really knowing what I was doing. I was just exploring the metal and plastic. Now I look at it, and there it is. It's a sign that--I call it Sign in Red later. But at the time when I did it, I didn't know what I was doing.

ROGERS: But you found now, in looking back at it. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: And also, in these interstices. That was another thing that happened to me that I really didn't know what in the hell I was doing, but it came to me from the work in the opening up of the volumes, see. It looks far apart--that looks far apart from here. But it really isn't. The wood pieces are very closely related to the metal pieces. And by the way, that one--not this one, but that one--this one [Gravity] definitely is the sign, the use of the sign. See, and that goes back even earlier than this.

ROGERS: There's another piece that I've seen in catalogs called Fertility. Is this the same piece? It's very similar to this. This one is called Gravity, and you mentioned last week that you were very strongly influenced by British Columbia and the native art there.

FALKENSTEIN: Maybe this is when the sign came to me. I mean, I don't know; maybe that's it. Kind of an unconscious borrowing from British Columbia, although it doesn't look like it, but the idea of the repetition of a unit.

ROGERS: I even saw part of that in that I saw some of the same linear patterns in that, too.

FALKENSTEIN: There you are. The kinds of curves. See,



again, see here, it's the tense contour, contouring tension.

ROGERS: I'm interested in knowing how you are able to constantly keep exploring new things. Aren't you ever tempted to keep repeating those which feel good and which you are comfortable with?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes. I do repeat. There are certain parts of my own work which continue to be exciting and giving to me, [and] it seems to be a repetition, but it isn't; it's not a repetition. What can I say? It's a continuing thing. It's not something that stops and makes you repeat, but rather you're continuing an idea, piece after piece. It's as though you're going over a whole thing over a long, long span of years. From '58 till now I've been on Point as a Set, and it's a continuing process evolving and changing and developing. I mean, there is no exact repetition ever.

ROGERS: But you have a unit that you would be still using?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but have you seen the differences?

Okay, look. Look at this. Let me show you. See that?

All right, that's one. Now, I'll show you another one.

ROGERS: This is [Point as a Set] Number 14.

FALKENSTEIN: Now here's one.

ROGERS: We're looking at a very large poster-size book in full color. [Baroque Ensemblists, by Michel Tapié]

FALKENSTEIN: All right, now, there's one. Look at that. See this, and look at this.





ROGERS: Yes. They're more curved than this one is.

FALKENSTEIN: And this is open. This is lyrical; the dimensions are different. The only thing that is alike is the process, but the actual working through the aesthetic possibilities of the process is varied. Every time it's different.

ROGERS: Well, because of the shape of the single unit, your interstices are different.

FALKENSTEIN: No. Not only is it the size of the unit or the size of the tube, but the length, the curvature, the space between, the positioning. There is no connection really between this and that, in the sense, let's say, of aesthetic elements. But the idea, the process, is the same in the sense that I'm working with these relationships in the same way. I mean I'm approaching the problem in the same way, but the result is different.

ROGERS: The reason I mentioned that is because artists have been known to repeat things over and over again rather than to go on to something new, because what they have done has been successful commercially; and rather than give up something that they know they will do well with and win awards and acclaim, they keep on doing it.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, maybe that's the reason I haven't gotten farther. [laughter]

ROGERS: I don't think you can complain about your acceptance.



FALKENSTEIN: No, but I'm thinking about some people, like for instance, [Louise] Nevelson. She did this one thing, this box, and she's done it for years and years and years and years. [##] Now, for instance, if I were only doing the Point as a Set, only doing that, I think I would go crazy. I'd go crazy. But I need the discipline once in a while to do one. So I'm up to about No. 36. I've done thirty-six. See, I number each one. And the biggest one is at the UCLA sculpture garden [No. 25]. You saw it.

ROGERS: In the sculpture garden, or the Hilgard entrance?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, the Hilgard entrance (but you continue on that way and you're in the sculpture garden; it's right at the entrance). And that is six feet in diameter; it has no relation at all aesthetically to these two that I've shown you. It's different in the sense that it's another proportion, another size, another scale, everything. And then one is at the Tate, which is another scale, another size, another attitude. And now one is at the San Francisco museum in that seventy-five-year survey of California art ["Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era"].

ROGERS: I haven't seen it, but I hope to.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that is there. I mean I have a big Point there. In fact, they're all over the world.

ROGERS: We're jumping ahead a little bit.

FALKENSTEIN: Go back!



ROGERS: Let's go back to the jewelry when you first started to work in small wire.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, okay. I'll tell you why I went into jewelry. It didn't have anything to do with ornamentation. What it had to do with was to--see, I was just getting into metal, and I treated jewelry as a means of teaching myself how to work metal. I could do little things and have lots of failures, and it wouldn't matter because they were just little things. I could try things out, techniques and forms and shapes. It was all aesthetic development for me, because I began to explore ideas and shape and form and so on through metal, which I'd never done before. And then I got really serious about it around 1951 in Paris. I did some metal casting for jewelry, and I developed some original ideas which now are in haute couture in France, in Scandinavia, and in New York. It all came about because I showed in London at the London [Institute of] Contemporary Art, I showed in Germany at the Werkbund, I showed in Brussels, I showed in Paris, I showed in Rome, I showed in Milan--and the ideas were picked up and spread around. Well, how I did them was very simple and very economical. I used bronze mostly. God, I began looking around and I saw all my ideas in gold and platinum and diamonds and everything. But I was the one to open up the necklet on the side. It's absolutely the most marvelous discovery that anybody's ever





made as far as wearing a piece of jewelry, because of what it does. And, you see, no jeweler would ever come to this idea, only a sculptor, because I had the idea of keeping the body intact, not breaking, not cutting off the head with a necklace that was going to cut you off at the neck, but rather to always have this open so that the neck was a part of the whole body. So here's a philosophical idea carried over into the form, and only a sculptor would have ever done it. But these people, these decorators, these jewelers, these tin people, they picked it up and treated it very decoratively, you know. For instance, I talked to a model, and she told me, "Oh, well, we like that necklace because we go in the dressing room and we change our costume, and all we have to do is grab something and go--wang--and there it's on already."

ROGERS: Now is this 1951, or are you talking later?

FALKENSTEIN: That is '51, '52, and '53 were the big creative years in jewelry. Also, I opened it in the back, I opened it in the front, so it just opened right down the front--nothing. Since then, a lot of people do it.

I showed in New York, too, by the way. Betty Parsons came to Paris, and she took back a whole group of jewelry. In fact, it was from Betty Parsons that the Museum of Modern Art got the piece they have.

ROGERS: Back into San Francisco again, you were teaching to earn a living and have an income coming in.



FALKENSTEIN: Well, I wouldn't say I was earning a living so much as earning my independence. I was married. I was being taken care of. I was very secure, but I couldn't allow myself to just accept that role of security, considering that I didn't want the burden of being just a housewife or whatever you want--I don't like to call it that--homemaker, let's say. I had this passion to create, and I just had to do it, but I just couldn't do it without contributing my own weight and freight.

ROGERS: Well, I'm thinking of timewise. Now, I'm visualizing someone who has to go and teach all day, and you're doing all this sculpting, you're working in wood, you're learning how to weld, you're working with wire for the first time, and rods, and are you doing any painting?

FALKENSTEIN: Yeah, lots of painting. I did a lot of painting, but now, I'm very careful about--I mean, I'm almost ready to do some more painting, but I haven't painted, really painted, for about four years. I've done a lot of drawing, but I haven't painted. But I mean, painting that piece of sculpture there is painting, in a sense, because what you're doing, you're working with a form and trying to get the right color, the right weight, the right everything for that form. Anyway, my attitude now is that I'm kind of involved with everything. It depends upon what I'm working with.

ROGERS: When you first did that sign, what you call the



Sign in Red, and laminated the red on the plastics, plastics were not readily available on the market. Where did you get the plastic?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there were places where you could get them, but it was the beginning of plastics, the beginning of the use of plastics. We could get it all right, but it was very expensive and very hard to get. And the technique was also hard to come by.

ROGERS: How did you. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Same way. I just found somebody who could help me with it.

ROGERS: In San Francisco?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: Isn't plastic quite dangerous to work with?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and that's the reason why I never had it here in my house, or in my studio. If I work with plastics, I'll go to another studio and work where they have it because I've done quite a lot of plastics. Not this year, but the year before--for two years I've worked quite a bit again in plastics. I just showed one at [the] Comsky [Gallery].

ROGERS: The laminating that you did in 1947 or whenever it was, did you pick that up again later, or was that just a single experiment that you did?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I did quite a few. I have some that I brought back from Paris. From that period, at that time,



I did quite a few, and then I never did it again. You know, this has been the story of my life, I think: it's rare that I found something that I can go on with. I mean, sure, the whole thing contributes to what you do and how you approach things. And they also contribute to your well-being; I mean, you satisfy yourself about something. But to continue along the certain vein of activity. . . . For instance, in my sheet metal work, I have something that I continue with, and in my copper organic structures, this sort of thing. This is in continuity, and the Points are in continuity. And this, see, that kind of organic structure is . . .

ROGERS: That's the fountain that you did for Long Beach [Structure and Flow, No. 3].

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. And my screens are in continuity, you see. But a lot of things aren't. I mean, I will try things or go into avenues for research, and sometimes just the fact of satisfying myself about a question that I might have, well, that's all I want to do and I just don't do anything more with it.

ROGERS: Are you tactile? Do you enjoy working with certain surfaces more than others?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: You don't seem to have done much more with clay.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I have. I mean, I used it for a long time, but not as a final medium. For instance, I just





did the Doge's Crown there.

ROGERS: Do you use it more as a bozetto?

FALKENSTEIN: I use it as a means towards getting ideas, but not as works of art. For instance, that is the basis for something I'm going to do in metal, and I worked it out in clay to get my form the way I want it.

ROGERS: I see. Will it be hollow?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure.

ROGERS: Well, the years in San Francisco were really . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Germinal.

ROGERS: . . . germinal. They were very productive, and they also accomplished establishing you as an international artist. You were ready for the one big step across the ocean. At what point did you say, "Now, now I'm going to go." Or was it just something that evolved? Did you go on a tour or something?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no, no. I always wanted to go to Paris. I think from the time in my junior year, I got awakened to this whole French formal attitude. And I must say that Worth Rider in a way projected a lot of Europe in his art history course. I didn't know what he was talking about, 'cause he used terms like Quattrocento, and I didn't know what that was, and he never explained his terms. [laughter] I mean they're simple enough if you just explain them. The fourteenth century--why didn't he say it? He was talking about Italy and Germany mostly. Then I heard a lot about



France from Stephen Pepper, and Pepper was the first time I heard about Brancusi. And I told you, I already had heard of that when I was in high school--I'd heard about Michelangelo. But it's very funny. You know, Americans are really--I don't think so now, because with TV and this more awakening towards teaching in relation to art, people have more of a liberated attitude; they seem to know more about what's going on there. But when I grew up, it was a kind of a very difficult and secret kind of thing, this thing of art.



TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 10, 1976

ROGERS: The last time we were together, Miss Falkenstein, we were discussing your eventual move from the Bay Area and San Francisco to Europe and what prompted the decision to go. Can we pick up from there and think back to the circumstances that were occurring maybe the few months before you decided to go, or the year before you decided to go?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'm going to try to think back and think about my frame of mind up to the time that I left for Paris. I think probably one of the desires was to meet the masters, to meet and really see these great artists that we had seen reproductions of. I wanted to meet Arp, I wanted to meet Brancusi, I wanted to talk with Henry Moore, I wanted to see as many as possible, and that was one of the most important reasons for going. Then next, just the general sense of this area, I mean, the fact that Europe had been a kind of seeding ground for painting and sculpture for two or three centuries, I don't know how many centuries. And America--well, it was as though they had come to some kind of resolution, and here we were just making it. And I felt that I wanted to establish some kind of roots, some psychological and ideological roots for myself, in going to Europe.

Well, in '49, I felt ready to go, and I was going to





go, but practically the day before I began to really seriously consider it, I was offered a big commission by Tommy Church to do the monument for the pioneers for the Laurel Hill Cemetery. The Laurel Hill Cemetery was set aside in San Francisco for those early pioneers who had come around the Horn and come across the plains, and this was to have been their resting ground for eternity; but suddenly the ground became so valuable that they were induced to sell it and to replace or displace all the graves and put them down into a regular part of a cemetery in Palo Alto (I forget the name of the cemetery). But anyway, so Tommy Church offered me the job to do the monument for the pioneers, and I accepted, and therefore I put off my going away. Well, I made a model. The idea was the seven: seven hills in San Francisco, seven hills in Rome. I thought of them as shapes, and I made oversize shapes which could be walked around and walked through and could be put on a terrace. And on the surface I was going to put a relief of the historical events, of coming across the plains, the bringing in of the railroads and so on. So it would have been big shapes that people could walk around and through, and then on the surface would be this relief for the telling of the story of the pioneers. Well, Tommy Church loved the idea and accepted it. The pioneers marveled at it and thought it was marvelous. But as soon as it was presented to the cemetery people, nothing was said, and they kept us hanging, waiting for



a year, and then they said no. The decision they gave was that it would cause too much interest, that the cemetery wasn't a showplace but it was a quiet place that should be left alone, and therefore to have a monument such as this would bring a lot of people down there just to look at the example of a work of art, rather than to think of it as a cemetery. Well, so then I decided, "Okay, I will go away." (By the way, that never was resolved. Several artists were tried, and they finally just put up an obelisk. That was all.)

But in the meantime, I then, after a year, made up my mind to go. I signed onto a tour, and I went on a ship. I had to leave from New York, so I left from New York and went on this English ship. By the way, my husband and I drove cross-country in a big station wagon, and I took a lot of sculpture with me and parked it in a storage in New York. I was looking ahead to the time when I would be coming back to New York (because I had already by that time had a show in New York in '44), so I was thinking about some kind of future action. So then I got my ship, which was an English ship called the Stratheden. It was the kind of ship that traveled in the tropics: it came from Australia, it came around and up along the Eastern Coast, and that's the reason we got it in New York (I got it in New York).

ROGERS: Your husband didn't go with you?



FALKENSTEIN: No, my husband didn't. He took me there, and then he came home. See, this was to be a tour of six weeks, a six-week tour.

ROGERS: Was it just a touristy kind of tour or. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Yeah, just an ordinary tour out of a tourist office, I've forgotten which. And by the way, from that tour I still know several people; we correspond at Christmas, and we keep in touch. In fact, when I had my show in 1959 in New York, one of them bought a piece out of the show. I mean, it's just amazing how in all of these happenings, there's some kind of residue that continues.

Anyway, so I went off, and we landed in London. I had these three letters of introduction from Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, [László] Moholy-Nagy's wife. I don't know whether he was still alive then. That was in 1950. Do you know? I've forgotten whether--he had had leukemia, and he was organizing his life, you know, let's say organizing after he would die, what would happen with the school, what would happen with his work. He was very active in this, and I don't remember whether he had already died or not. But she came over--she called me up, as a matter of fact; she knew I was going to Europe, so she called me up (that was when I was in Berkeley) and said that she would like to really talk to me about some of these experiences I was going to have. It was one of the most marvelous things that ever happened to me, that this great woman would make this effort to come over and see me and tell me about it.





ROGERS: Did you ever have any contact with her before?

FALKENSTEIN: I never had any contact with her before, except just meeting her, that's all. So it was just a kind of wonderful gratuitous gesture on her part. And it turned out to be a very important thing, because I think she sent me also to somebody at the Museum of Modern Art. Because I met somebody there and I can't remember who else would have sent me. But in New York I was there long enough to go to the Museum of Modern Art to meet this person, and they gave me a letter of introduction to Arp when I arrived in Paris. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy gave me three letters of introduction for London. One was to Henry Moore, one was to Herbert Read, and the other one was to Ashley Havenden. And in each case, these were key people. Well, it's very funny. I went with this tour, and they all went out to Stratford upon Avon and went to everything that a tour does. But I just cut myself off from them and went very quietly and alone to all these places. And when we were through with London, which were about five days, we all met at the railroad station--yeah, I guess it was, because we had to take a train. So then we took the boat over the Channel and then we went to Germany. Anyway, we took the boat across the Channel and we landed someplace, I've forgotten. And we went to Germany, but I don't forget that.

In the meantime, in London, they went on their way,





and I went on my way. I was invited out by Ashley Havenden to the Green Belt overnight, and he also took me to several places in town, one day for lunch and another day for something else. We went to the National Gallery; I was taken to the National Gallery. I met Herbert Read, and he took me out. Actually it was he who took me out to Henry Moore's. At that time I was writing for Arts and Architecture (you knew I was writing for Arts and Architecture). So I did an article [in the October 1950 issue]. I decided, well, this is the time to write on Henry Moore. So I told Henry Moore that I was writing for Arts and Architecture, would he like it, could he give me some photos, and could he give me an interview? He said sure. So he did, and I wrote it up and sent it back, and it was printed. And I have it someplace (I think it's in Paris, in one of those Arts and Architectures). Did you see it?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Did you read it?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Well then, that's when it happened, when I first landed in London.

So then we went to Germany, and I'll never forget it: we landed in Cologne. We stopped at Cologne, because I remember the Cologne cathedral. It had been bombed, and it was just a shell. See, this was '50; that was only five years after the war. When I look back now at five



years, it doesn't seem very long, and these people were still recovering from all that in Europe. I remember that night there was no place to stay for us to sleep. We had to sleep in the bombshelter, and it was just awful: no air, you know, no comforts or anything. But because of it, I remember it. And a lot of these things I don't remember, 'cause it was just so comfortable.

ROGERS: Isn't that rather unusual for a tour of that nature to have accommodations that were so . . .

FALKENSTEIN: There were no other accommodations. It was only five years after the war, and there were no hotels available, at that time, for us. So we slept in the bombshelter. Well, anyhow, then we went on to--where did we go? Paris? Anyway, I remember mostly traveling through France. I don't remember very much because it was really so hectic and it was really a hard trip. Oh, I know. We went to Switzerland, because we were in Zermatt, and we went up to the Matterhorn. I remember that.

So anyway, the whole thing was opening up to me this gradually--I mean, I was seeing a civilization much, much older than I had even seen or thought about.

I guess from Switzerland, where could we have gone? But I remember coming back to Paris. And these two people that I befriended, and who are my friends still, were a couple--he was a doctor. I got a terrible cold on the way back, 'cause it was a really hard tour--we were put to it, we were pushed.



I remember, oh, I remember! We went to Italy. We went all the way down to Italy, because I remember that was the first time I saw Venice. I remember seeing, coming--but why was I late? I think I was someplace doing something else, and the tour went on, and then I had to meet them in Venice. I was always doing something else and catching up with them someplace. I landed in Venice, and I was alone, but I managed. I got a gondola and got over to the mainland. I was walking around hunting for Piazza San Marco--I wanted to see the church, the basilica--and I came upon it by a little street. I came around, and there the whole thing opened up. I couldn't believe it. It was the most magical sight I'd ever seen in my life. And I remember when I landed first in Venice. I mean, there were just waterways--I mean, that's it. And I said, "Well, it really exists. I can't believe it, but it really . . ." And I've never gotten over that: I think Venice is one of the most marvelous cities that I can ever, ever hope to see or be in. Do you know Venice?

ROGERS: Only by pictures.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you have no idea until you're there. I mean, the pictures give you an idea, sure. But when you're there and you're standing before it, it's just unbelievable. It's just unbelievable.

So anyway, we finally got back to Paris, and I think we had a week in Paris. But here I was--we were in a





lousy hotel on the Right Bank. He was a doctor, see, and he says, "Now, Claire, the only way you're going to get over that cold is to stay in bed"--and here I was at this awful hotel. I remember there was a lot of red--a red carpet, a red bedspread, and a red something that I forget. So I didn't want to go back with them. First, I felt sick. Next, I felt, "Well, as long as I'm here and I haven't met all these people that I want to meet--I haven't met Arp--why don't I just stay and keep my ticket and just go back a little later?" So I told them, "Well, you go ahead, and I'll just find my way back to New York on my own." I'd done that the whole time (I'd gone here and there).

So they left, and they left me with misgivings, 'cause here I was sick in bed in this hotel room on the Right Bank with no money, not knowing the language, not knowing a soul, just alone. And I wasn't afraid at all. I mean, I really found it to be very interesting, except I hated that room. You know, it was awful. The bed was lumpy, and of course it was an introduction to the continental breakfast. But I adapted. And I had a friend there who had written me that she was out at the Cité Universitaire, which is quite a way away, but the university has housing facility and studios for artists and so on, if you have a grant; and she had a grant, so she was living out there. It's like an American house, and you live there very inexpensively. She had this studio given to her because she had a grant



of some sort. So I called her up. It was Dorr Bothwell (I don't know if you've ever heard of her). She had been a teacher at the school, at the California School of Fine Arts, when I was, and although we weren't friends, and I really didn't approve of her as an artist, you know, she was the only one I could think of that I knew. So I called her and said, "Look, I'm in an awful hotel. What can I do?" By that time my cold had cleared up (it was about two days later). "I really feel that I'm not in a very good part of Paris. I don't think this part . . ." It looked awful. It was kind of in one of those back streets near the Opéra. So she said, "Well, Claire, there's a new hotel down here in Montparnasse, and there's a lot of people that you might know, because a lot of Americans come to stay in Montparnasse. Why don't you come down and find the hotel?" I remember the name was something Carlton, the Carlton Hotel. So I did. I went down and asked them if they had a room--yes, they had a room--so then I went back and got all my suitcases and everything and I settled in there. Well, it turned out to be not so good either, because it had an outside elevator that was going up and down all night, and it was over a metro. [laughter] But it wasn't very far away from the Alliance Française, and we all went to the Alliance Française, all the Americans, in order to at least get some beginning of French. It was only two blocks up.

And then suddenly I found all these friends from San



Francisco. They were all here, right in Montparnasse. But that had nothing to do with me. I came over by the tour; they came, each one kind of on his own. It was kind of an exodus from San Francisco at that time in 1950. Still, I think, went to Texas (I believe it was Texas) to teach, and somebody else went. [Douglas] MacAgy went to Canada, I think (he was the director of the school). Practically all of the people who had taught scattered. Diebenkorn, I think, went to the Southwest someplace to teach. We were all spread out, either going away from San Francisco in America, or getting out of America into Europe and Paris.

ROGERS: Was there something as a catalyst that caused you all to leave San Francisco?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there were different reasons. It was the beginning of the Korean War. That was the reason, I think, that some of the men artists left, because they didn't want to become involved in that. I don't know, but it seems to me that I remember something like that: they had already been in the war, and some of them were on reserve or something, I don't know. And then I think, too, it was the McCarthyist time, if you remember. America really was pretty tense and . . . But why should we leave San Francisco? I don't know. Except in my case, I had wanted to leave a year before and would have, except for that commission. So I mean, I had developed up to the



point where I wanted to have this experience of establishing my roots in a culture other than what I had known in San Francisco--you know, broaden my view.

ROGERS: Was San Francisco part of this? Who else was involved?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, Sam Francis, Frank Lobdell, Jack Jefferson. (Did Jack Jefferson go? I don't know if Jack Jefferson went.) Anyway, Kilwaskie [?], I never really knew what his name was. I know his face. He was one. There were about eight people, and we all formed a group in Paris at that time, American. And that's where I met Allan Temko. He was from San Francisco, but he was a writer and had a Fulbright to do a book on Notre Dame. And what else, who else?

ROGERS: Well, you mentioned Richard Diebenkorn.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, no, he didn't go.

ROGERS: He wasn't there?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no. To my knowledge, he's never worked in Europe. He went to the Southwest. It was either Arizona or Mexico or New Mexico where he went. Or it could have been even the East. I don't think so, though. And so did Clyfford Still. He went to the Southwest also. Clyfford Still never worked in Europe. Well, what else?

ROGERS: Well, you mentioned Walter Kuhlman.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes, Walter Kuhlman was one of them--Walt. I think he had just gotten married. Frank was





getting a divorce. [laughter] Everybody was really kind of disturbed. I mean the whole world was disturbed. But then when I got there, and began to make a life for myself, I began to decide that I couldn't go back as soon as I had anticipated, that I would stay on a while. So I wrote home and said, "Look, I've decided to stay on, because this is what I've wanted all the time. I'm just beginning to realize some of the potential, and I just can't leave."

ROGERS: Now what span of time are you talking about, weeks or months?

FALKENSTEIN: Weeks, weeks. Then I took another trip to Italy. On the way, I remember I went to Cagnes-sur-Mer in the south of France. Of course I didn't have very much money and I was always traveling third-class and sitting up in the train, was always going by train and sitting up all night. It was really very hard, but very interesting.

ROGERS: You were operating strictly out of savings?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, mostly. Well, by then, you see, I was still receiving money from home. But in the meantime, in Cagnes-sur-Mer, I met an artist who was very interested in . . . See, I always carried my photographs with me, and I showed my work wherever I went. So we made friends. He was very friendly. And he said, "Now, when you go back to Paris. . . ." The woman he was living with presently (now, whether she was his wife or his mistress, I don't know, but he was living with her), her mother's apartment



was free. And this was out at Neuilly, which is a suburb of Paris. That sounded great, 'cause then I'd get out of that hotel. And it was very funny, too, how I arranged that when I went to Italy. I just simply parked my bags and everything in a closet downstairs, and they were very accommodating. Then I went off to Italy. Then when I got back, I had this place to go to, so I took all my things and went out to Neuilly. I soon found that the apartment was not really free; it had his niece in it, who was an unmarried mother. She had just had a baby, was very unhappy, and I shared this apartment with her, with this newborn baby and this very unhappy unmarried mother. Ugh! So I thought, "Well, this isn't going to last very long. I'm not going to stay here very long. I'm going to look for another place."

So I stayed there for about, oh, I should say about five months, and then I found another place over at the Trocadero, across from the Eiffel Tower, in that area, with another girl, another French girl. I got that through the American academy there. (It's called the American Club, I guess.) That's where all the Americans go; they have a swimming pool and studio space if you want it, and so on. But it's so amateurish, and you get involved with so many people that you don't want to become involved with. . . . I started to go there at first and then I stopped, because I just didn't like the whole group of people. But they



had a bulletin board, and on it, it said, well, now here's an apartment for rent, half of an apartment to share with a French girl. So I thought, "Well, maybe that would be better than this other place." So I went over there. It turns out she was completely opposite from the other one. This one was so happy, she was singing all these popular French tunes day and night, and she had the pickup going day and night. And I thought, "Oh my God, what am I going to do now?" So I stayed there about the same length of time.

Then something turned up through an association with a girl from Germany. She was an American, and she had a friend whose apartment--no, he used her apartment in Holland, if she could use his apartment in Paris. They exchanged. And when she saw his apartment, she didn't want anything to do with it, it was so awful. But by this time I didn't care: anything to be alone and not have these French girls who were--one of them so unhappy, the other one too happy. So she said, "Now look, if you want it you can have it." So I went over and saw it--and that was the place that finally I lived in for nine years!

[13, rue de Savoie]

It was one room and it looked out on a garden and had one big window--and that saved me--which looked on a roof, which acted as kind of a terrace. Then there was this marvelous garden with great trees and everything. So that





window saved me; otherwise I couldn't have stood it. So anyway, I began to fix it up. I cleaned it and got some of the bricks into the floor where the bricks were out of the floor. The floor was tile (something like this except they're octagonal), and I got some bedsheets and had them for curtains, you know, like unbleached muslin. They had a bed, so I got myself some bedding (there was some bedding, but I didn't like it, so I got rid of it). And I don't know how it happened, but finally I had begun to have a place where everybody wanted to come to. There was one room about three-quarters as big as this room.

ROGERS: Would you say about maybe 15 feet by 18 feet?

FALKENSTEIN: No, that's too big. I would say about 12 feet by 14 feet, something like that.

ROGERS: Did you have cooking facilities?

FALKENSTEIN: Yeah. Well, I had a two-burner gas, just surface, cold water, no heat, no toilet. The toilet was downstairs, and it was a public toilet. And I had it that way for years, for about five years; then I had a toilet put in, and then they raised my rent. [laughter] I put it in but then they raised my rent. I wasn't paying very much.

ROGERS: About how much were you paying?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know what the franc was at that time. It seems to me I was paying about eight francs--I don't know, I think I must have been paying about twenty-five



dollars a month, or something like that. But in the meantime I was living on very little, so I couldn't spend any money on rent because I had to buy materials. By the way, I found a way to use a gasoline torch, and I used it right there. See, I had a tile floor, so I could work right there. And then I got a bellows: I began to work with the natural gas and bellows, and I could do a lot more. That's where I did all my most important--that's where I discovered all the ideas for jewelry and all that.

But all those people! I can tell you that that room certainly had vibrations by the time I moved out. The people who came into that room were so absolutely fabulous when I think about it--Jean Renoir; all the people from the Museum of Modern Art would visit me there, like Dorothy Miller; and Peggy Guggenheim came, and Gordon Washburn (he was the director of the Carnegie Institute). And when I think about the people who came--all these French people, Michel Tapié. Tobey used to be a regular visitor; he would come and "Claire," he says, "do you think the people back home would understand if they saw this place, how you're living?" But pretty soon he didn't care. I mean, he came and he liked it because it had such an ambience. He'd come for lunch, and I'd cook him these little carrots. (You know, they have these French carrots which are about that long. They're kind of stubby, and they're delicious. Of course, the food there is very delicious anyhow because it's



organically grown. You don't have this tasteless vegetable there; they're all full of flavor.) And of course all the artists, I mean Sam and Allan Temko and everybody, everybody that you can think of at that time. In fact, I had a hard time keeping them out, because I had no protection; I just had that one door. It was a concierge's lodge. See, that's what it was, from the seventeenth century. See, this building was a seventeenth-century building, built in 1600, though. In fact, it was built earlier; it was built in the sixteenth century, because the grave of the person whose house it was was down in the courtyard, and he died in 1618. So it was built earlier. This place where I lived was before the pilgrims landed! [laughter]

ROGERS: That must have given you a whole new outlook.

FALKENSTEIN: Can you imagine? I came from this very, well--a well-appointed home in the Berkeley hills, with all the security and all the ease of comfortable living, clothing, everything, and suddenly I was put upon to survive. Evidently I sort of wanted that experience, because I didn't want to give it up. I wouldn't go back.

ROGERS: How did your husband react to this?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, he came over. See, he wrote and said, "Now look. . . ." We'd write lots of letters back and forth, and I just kept telling him, "Look, I haven't finished. This is an experience I have to finish." So he said, "Well, I really have to see you, so I'm going





to come over." So he came over, and we took a trip to Italy together, and we talked it over. And then he wanted to know, "Well, now are you ready?" And I said, "No, I'm not ready to come back." So I stayed on, and I stayed on for five years (well, four more years, 'cause it was five years from the time I left). Then I went home to see if I could really adjust to our marriage, to the whole living ambience that I had known before. Well, I couldn't. So I said, "No, I don't want this. I'm going back." Now, by that time I had a contract in a gallery, and I could live then on my own, so I didn't have to look really to his support.

ROGERS: During those years, he helped you?

FALKENSTEIN: He helped me, yes. [##]

So then, in '55, that's when I came back and sort of reassociated myself with my friends and my former life, and so on. I stayed for about, oh, I don't know, not too long, not more than a month, and then I went back to Europe. I went back to Paris. That was '55. And then in '57--I didn't come back in '56, or did I? I think I came back in '56, too. (I'll have to really kind of put that down someplace. I'm trying to associate different things.) I know I went to the Biennale in Venice in '56, and I know I finished a big sculpture in '56 which is that Homage to Gaudi, and I went to Spain in '57. And I came here in '57. Yes, I was here in '56. I'll tell you why: I was invited by Gurdon Woods to teach at the California School of Fine





Arts again, if I wanted to. So in '57--that's when I did the gates down in Santa Marinella (Rome) for the Princess Pignatelli, and that's when I worked with Luigi Moretti in Italy, in Rome. What year was it that we all were down there in Rome?

ROGERS: Well, perhaps I can help you out with those dates when we get into more detail.

FALKENSTEIN: I'll tell you when it was--it was '54 when we were in Rome. No, because in '57 I did the gates. It took me four months, and I was on the beach in Santa Marinella, working with this helper, and we did the gates for the Princess Pignatelli.

I came then back to America and I taught--oh, I know how I got back. See, I'm still--I don't have much money yet. I mean, everything is done in a very, very economical way. So Garrett Eckbo said, "Claire, in '58 there's going to be this National Design Conference at Aspen. I would like you to come back from Europe and represent sculpture. We'll pay your way back." So I had a coming ticket from Paris to come back to represent sculpture. Well, so what I did was to come and do a whole year in San Francisco in '58. I was there a whole year trying to adjust to earning my living in America. So first of all, I taught at the school. [##] So then I had two big shows--one at the museum, which I did all of the work right there at that time, at the San Francisco museum; and then I had a big show at Bolles Gallery.



Well, I made a lot of new friends; among them were the museum director (his name was [George] Culler) and some of the people on the board of directors of the museum. So they said, "Look, we have an idea." The friends of the museum-- I guess they called them like the friends affiliated with the museum--they wanted to do a tour of France sponsored by the museum, and they thought I would be the one to do it. So they said, "Would you be willing to take a group around France, considering you've lived there?" (See, by that time I'd been there eight years.) And I said, "Well, yes, I'd love to do that, especially if I don't have to do any of the business part of it." So they had a courier and a driver, and we had a bus. They said, "Now, this will all be taken care of. All the business part will be done by the courier. All you have to do is be the one to keep the group together, keep them happy, introduce them to the work, organize the activities. And it will be for three weeks." So I thought, "Well, that's wonderful." So that's how I got my trip paid back. [laughter] So my trip was paid back to Europe by them.

So then we all met in Paris, I remember, on the Quai Voltaire. I didn't know what or who would be there, you know; they came independently and I had arrived before. So I just came over from my studio; it was down the street from Quai Voltaire. I lived at Quai des Grands Augustins, around the corner from Picasso, as a matter of fact. So I



met them, and here were--how many?--about twelve or thirteen people, one man and all the rest women. And there were about five from Long Beach (how they got into this San Francisco museum tour, I don't know). But this was the first museum tour ever done. After that it became very popular--all the museums did and do it now--but that was the first. It was a cultural tour. So we landed in Paris, as I said, and I began introducing them to art and to my friends--and by then I had great friends. We had lunch with Giacometti, I took them to the studios of Corbusier (because we were going later to Ronchamp, which was a new chapel he did between Switzerland and France). We went to quite a few art studios related to Galerie Stadler. I took them to Galerie Stadler. They had a reception for this great Japanese flower arranger who does sculpture, Sofu Teshigahara. So they had that experience. Then we went to see Jean Renoir's studio, a place where he was dubbing in music to one of his films. We went there and saw that. Anyway, this week in Paris was absolutely mind-boggling for them. They couldn't believe it, you know. I can't either. I don't think anyone ever in the world could have done anything more or better than I did for that group, because I was with it in it. So no one could have done that, and these people participated because of me. For instance, Michel Tapié--see, then we went on the road, and he is a relative of Toulouse-Lautrec, so he sent us to Albi with





personal help to be introduced to the museum and all of the archives or anything we wanted of Toulouse-Lautrec. A friend of Edith--Edith Raucher [de Bonnafos] was the secretary of the gallery, but also she was a docent at the Louvre, so one of her friends was a director of the Cézanne museum at Aix. So we went to Aix and met the director of the museum and saw everything about Cézanne. We had the personal encouragement to understand and to see a lot of things that we never would have otherwise. And I remember one of them had a marvelous apartment on the Ile St. Louis.



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FALKENSTEIN: Well, anyway, one of them--and I can't remember who; I think it was another one of the docents at the Louvre--by the way, we were taken through the Louvre, and it was very interesting, because Edith was devoted to Napoleon and to that period; so here were these tremendous canvases of David and all that of the Empire period, and she would talk about them and about the story and about the costume. [##] But in the meantime, it was a wonderful experience for them because they were personally escorted through these very great, vast areas that they never would probably pull themselves through otherwise. And then we went--the tour was so marvelous. At that time, Lascaux was still open to the public, and we went through those prehistoric caves at Lascaux--which are closed now. You can't even get in it. It makes me sick to think that I didn't get more documentation at that time. I had the weight of these people on me, and I lost track sometimes about my own gathering material for myself for the future. But we stayed a while at Nice. One of the reasons the tour was so successful was because I allocated jobs to everybody. [laughter] One of them had been on a gourmet tour before, so she took care of all of our ordering, you know, and she knew exactly what



to order. I never ate so well in my life before. We went to the four-star restaurants, you know. It was all first-class. Then another one would do something else. So everybody was kind of with it. You know, they were all working at it and loving it, just enjoying themselves.

Well, it turned out, when we finally got back to Paris. . . . Edith said, "Claire, when you come back, you're just going to hate those people. You're never going to speak to them again." And when I came back, she says, "Claire, isn't it just the way I told you?" I said, "No! We're friends. It was just marvelous. It was more fun. We had more fun." Well, it turned out that that tour got me here, because among those from Long Beach were the Buffums (you know, the Buffum's [Department] Store over in Long Beach) and Dallas Conklin of the Press Telegram. So she said, "I'm building a house"--this is when we're all saying goodbye--"I'm building a house, Claire, come next year. I want you to do something for my entrance." And then the Buffums said, "We want you to do a fountain for our garden." So I said, "Sure, I will." So I came in 1960 and I did it. I did the piece for Dallas Conklin which is over on her front porch right now (if you ever want to see it, it's over there). I didn't do the Buffum thing until later, about a year later. But while I was here, I introduced Michel Tapié to--he came along by invitation from this group to lecture. So anyway,



he--I'm trying to think what happened--oh, I know. He was invited to speak at the Esther Robles Gallery to a group of the local artists and critics. And I introduced him. Well, I told the Robles, I said, "I'm interested in coming back and having an exhibition if anytime you would be interested in having me do it." Nothing was said at the time, but in 1961, they came to Europe and invited me to come to Los Angeles and do a commission for them and have an exhibition. And then, you see, I had this other fountain to do for the Buffums. So I came back in '62, at the end of '62, and I had a show with the Robles--first I did the fountain for the Buffums, the fountain for the Robles, and then the exhibition. And I received a big commission for Wilshire: Ric Brown, who was then the director of the museum, invited me to do that. He was the artistic counselor for California Federal Savings and Loan. So then I had to find a place to do it. So I began looking around for real estate, and I bought this.

[laughter]

ROGERS: Well, that gives us kind of a ten-year synopsis in just a very short period of time.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it shows you all these connections, how I finally got here.

ROGERS: Well, that's why I was interested, to see how it all fell in place. But I'm going to want to go back now and start from those early years and get a little more detail and depth.





FALKENSTEIN: All right, now I'll tell you what happened. How is it that in that length of time, within a very short length of time, I would be able to get a contract with a gallery in Paris? I mean, it's really extraordinary. A lot of it came out of poverty, because my technique came out of poverty in the sense that I was brazing. See, I had the technique before I left, in the sense that I did jewelry, and I did small sculptures.

ROGERS: This is one thing that I don't think we really established, that the last year at California School of Fine Arts you were doing some brazing with wire.

FALKENSTEIN: Yeah, but not making structures. I didn't make a structure of wire until '53. It took me three years. Now, you see here, this is using metal. Down here are some small things.

ROGERS: Now, we're looking at some of your work in a one-man show at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1948 where there are some wire structures.

FALKENSTEIN: But they're not wire structures so much as, oh, like a delineation. See here? This was '49.

ROGERS: In 1949. That's made of iron.

FALKENSTEIN: Now, that is stovepipe wire. Now, this was done here. This was not done in Europe. So this is the beginning of what happened later.

ROGERS: This is what I wanted to establish, that before you even went to Europe, you had begun some development



of the concept of drawing in space, or enclosing space by the lines rather than the masses. There was a whole new concept that was in Europe, too, that you didn't have to have . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, there was no concept like that in Europe. That's the reason that I had the success.

ROGERS: Well, I was thinking of the constructivists.

FALKENSTEIN: No, the constructivists are entirely different. Because this is topological, and the constructivists are abstract geometrists.

ROGERS: And there was a continuity to this.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, that's what I'm talking about. You see, it's different from the constructivists. The constructivists are definitely geometrists. But this, you see, went into this kind of thing, and that, which is a total structure of wire. . .

ROGERS: That's the Sun Series that you did.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, the Sun Series.

ROGERS: And those were done in 1954.

FALKENSTEIN: I started in '53. Now, for instance, this is the first. It's called the Sign of Leda.

ROGERS: It's right over here on the next page.

FALKENSTEIN: How come you have two of these?

ROGERS: Joann Phillips gave it to me.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, are you going to give it back to her?

ROGERS: Probably.



FALKENSTEIN: If you don't, give it to me. [laughter]  
This is it, the Sign of Leda. You know, the mythological, the whole thing of Leda and the swan--this is it. You have here--it's hard to see from that photo, but you have the two, Leda and the swan, in connection. And this element moves like that. It's really quite a sexy piece because of the attitude--and very, very grasping. This belongs to Michel Tapié. I wish I had it, but I don't. A lot of these early things he got. But it was through them that I got my contract and that I became part of the whole active artists group in Paris.

ROGERS: Well, now, these first six months where you moved into your small one-room and you had to get some equipment together and start working, did you start to work right away or did you do some sightseeing? How did you integrate yourself into this?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, even in the sightseeing--when I went the second time to Italy was the time I did my first bronze casting, because I decided that while I was . . . When I went to Italy this time, instead of going only to Venice and Rome, as we did before, I went to Florence and Pisa and several other places. When I was in Florence, I stayed in the pensione right on the Arno, and I decided, "My God, here I am in Florence. Why don't I do something for bronze casting, as long as I'm here?" And I did. While I was in there for about three days, I did a sculpture, and I got





it to a bronze caster. I'm not sure, but I have here something--I think this was done in Paris; I think this was cast in Paris. But it's around that same time--I mean that same push of doing small elements that could be easily cast, not too expensive, and small enough to carry with me. And then they sent it to me, or I picked it up. How did I get it later? I took it to the bronze caster, he did it, and I think he sent it to me. I guess I got it through customs later. So that was my first, probably most important first thing that I did in Paris.

However, before that, I did some painting at the free studio in Paris (it's called the Grande Chaumière, the Atelier Libre). So immediately, soon as I got over that cold and moved to that hotel, I began to go to Alliance Française, and I found that Atelier Libre. In fact, I found that through Frank Lobdell and the rest, 'cause they were all there, too. There was no place else to work; we were all in hotels. So I began painting, see, first, and drawing, because I . . . And then the most important thing that happened to me--I guess those bronze things were not the first things at all, or were they? Yes, I guess they were, because when I came back and went back to the Atelier Libre, I met Gabriel Kohn, who is a sculptor and who had just come back from Italy (he was then a surrealist, very representational surrealist work). I showed him my photos--see, I always had my



photos--and he says, "Oh, you have to get into a place where you can do some sculpture." I said, "Yes, that's what I want. Have you any idea of where I can go?" He says, "Well, I know a Spanish sculptor [Honorio Condo] up here on rue Boissonade." It was a garden where a lot of the Spanish refugees from the Spanish war lived in little studios. They still live there. So he says, "I think he'll rent a little piece in the studio to you." He had a studio about one-quarter this room, filled with logs, and a little place where he himself was working about as big as this couch. And that guy, he was so nice, and he said, "All right, you can come here." So I bought a log from Africa. I bought a nine-foot-long log from him, mahogany; so I had about half the space that he had, and I had to sit on it to work on it, 'cause there was no other space. And that's when I met Michel Tapié. He came in one day and I was sitting on there, hammering away. And he kept coming back to see the progress of this piece. Well, I finally finished the piece, and it was shown at the Realités Nouvelles and was very well received. Then I finally got it back, and who should come, after how many years later, and see it, and buy it, but Dallas Conklin on that trip sponsored by the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1958. So that helped me. I began to get some sales and some money. She has it over there in Long Beach. That's



the first big sculpture and probably the first really important thing that I did in Europe. Then I bought another log and began working on it, and he became sick. In fact, he got cancer, and he had to go to Spain to die, which he did. And then, of course, there was no place, naturally, for me. Where did I take that? I don't know. I'm trying to remember how those big pieces got shifted around, because now I've got that big piece. It's not completely finished--it never will be finished--and it's in my studio in Paris now, that second log. Well, then the third big piece was a twelve-foot plank, and I rented space in a woodworking shop and did it there. You know, I had to figure out these things and go around and try to find some way of doing something. Everybody was sympathetic, but no one had very much anyway. I mean, this poor sculptor didn't have very much space for himself, but he let me come in. Isn't that something?

ROGERS: The camaraderie of one artist to another, I guess, can be only understood by another artist.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's just fantastic. I've never seen it anywhere else like that.

ROGERS: Was this the little workshop that was near Picasso's studio?

FALKENSTEIN: No, this was on rue Boissonade. Now that's Montparnasse. And where I lived in this one-room, after I moved three times, was Saint-Germain-des-Prés. That's



near the quai, near the river; I was one street back from the river, very damp. I was only up one-half flight (entresol they call it), and I lived in this little concierge's lodge all those years. I can't believe it, but I did. The years went by, though, because I was traveling a lot. I was in Italy a lot; I had a show in England in '52; I had a show in Germany in '51. You see, I got going pretty quickly, when you think of it, landing in 1950 with nothing and then finding my materials and getting going and working and finally having . . .

Oh, I'll tell you another thing that helped. I went to the studio of [Stanley William] Hayter to do prints, and that's when I began developing my Struttura Graphica, which is not a conventional way of printing. What I did was low-relief sculptures and then print them. He allowed me to use an old beaten-up press, but he wouldn't give me any blankets, so I cut up one of those blankets on that bed and took it and used it to print with.

ROGERS: Now, we might as well talk about that now because this process of printing with objects--it's a very tenuous thing. You can tear the paper. You have to have a special kind of paper, don't you, and doesn't the pressure of the press do something to your piece itself?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the reason Hayter didn't want me to use his press is because I was just probably dislocating everything. What's the question?





ROGERS: Could you describe what you did a little bit, just to outline the technique?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I evidently could not find any kind of joy in working just simply as a gravurist or as an etcher. In fact, the technique got in the way of my feeling, and I began trying to think, "Well, what do I want to do?" And I thought, "Well, I love graphics," 'cause as I told you, I did lots of drawing when I was in school and right out, afterwards. And then I got into sculpture. And my idea was to unite graphics and sculpture. So I was trying to find a way to do it with freedom, with liberty. So I began with my torch. I started with this gasoline torch in my room. I had by that time learned where to go to get brass and iron and so on. So I had materials, and I began working out low-relief burnt metal structures. And so pretty soon I began, and pretty soon Hayter--God, I'd come in to the shop and everybody was drawing carefully and quietly, and here I'd come in with all these wires and everything, and he would just go "Ohhh," like that. He'd take the thing, "Okay, you can have that press over there, but you can't have these blankets." So I just thanked him, 'cause I was just glad to find someplace where I could do something, just like I had to rent from the sculptor, and I had to rent from the woodshop. So now I was paying him for a little beat-up press without any blankets, 'cause he wouldn't let me use blankets, but I had my own. You



know, I cut up my own blankets, but my bed blanket, it wasn't felt.

ROGERS: I don't understand the process. What is the process that uses the blankets?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, this is a bed of steel, and when you print, when you do an etching, you roll paper on this bed under pressure, and it's like sandwiched in between two pieces of steel and pushed down so that you get your impression. And I was getting an impression, but not of drawing--of sculpture. So naturally I had to learn how to adjust my rollers so that I wouldn't get too much pressure and smash the paper. And then I'd have to learn how I could transfer color, so I just put it on with my hands, the color. Well, from '53, I had about four really strong working sessions. When I say, "strong working," I mean I worked several months until I achieved something, and then I'd stop. Then maybe a year would go by, and then I would start again and try to achieve something. But it was always for the idea of combining graphics with sculpture. That was for the graphics, see. But by the time I had this exhibition in Germany . . . By the way, it was at the Werkbund; I don't know whether you've ever heard of it, but it's like the forerunner of the Bauhaus. Hitler had outlawed it, and this was the first show they had since the war. And I was in it; I was represented by jewelry and graphics. The graphics are of this development



that I was doing, combining sculpture with graphics, making a sculpture into a graphic, really.

ROGERS: This is 1952, so you had from 1950--would you say eighteen months or so that you were . . .

FALKENSTEIN: That's it.

ROGERS: What kind of problems did you encounter? Did you have some failures before?

FALKENSTEIN: Lots of failures. In fact, the reason that I was constantly--see, I was doing the big log and then I was doing little jewelry. And the big log was kind of big, hard, long--it was nine feet high, the girth was about fourteen inches thick, and I was carving that, you know, sitting on it. So I needed something that I could achieve, some kind of satisfaction in an immediate sense, not always this long, long thing, you know, just killing me. So that's the reason I got into these small things. And I learned a lot, too. I treated it, as I told you before, as a way of learning, the jewelry as a way of learning how to treat metal and [learning] design, too. Anyway, so then that was the first, in '52.

Then, in '53, the director of the London Institute of Contemporary Arts came to Paris. He was brought to my studio and saw my jewelry and my gravure and invited me to a show. So I went over to London and had that show. So this is what happened: even though I lived in one room, it wasn't a sad room. It was really kind of a clearinghouse





of all kinds of people. I could do these things and then begin to go out. And then in '54 was when I went to Rome-- that was when I went to Rome.

ROGERS: Now, when you were working with the metals, let's say in those first two years before you exhibited your first exhibit there, were you given any instructions?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, hell, no! I was instructing everybody else. I mean, all these people would come to me and ask me questions. I couldn't believe it.

ROGERS: You were just . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Look, don't you know that by this time I had been teaching in America a long time? I didn't need instruction. What I needed was a chance to exercise some of the things that I had been feeling and thinking that I never had a chance to do before. See, this is one of the things that happened to me during that period. I didn't have all of the normal living kind of things pressing in on me. I was just absolutely free. It was the first time in my life that I had the chance to do these things. Up to this time, I was chasing and running and trying to meet obligations. And you know, I was teaching; I was talking; I was a housewife, you know--all these things. Suddenly I didn't have any of this, and I was just working.

ROGERS: In getting instruction, I didn't mean so much in the design as much as I meant in just techniques of some of the new things you were trying.



FALKENSTEIN: No, no one had ever done this before. Who had tried to do low-relief sculpture in paper? No one had tried to do it that I know of before that time; no one knew anything about it. I think I'm the first one, to my knowledge, to have done such a thing.

ROGERS: Did you try things that didn't work?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure, of course. That is part of the teaching of oneself, is to explore and be willing to fail.

ROGERS: And your end product, was it. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: It was up to me. And by the way, this is very interesting. One of the great things that I found in Europe that I never found in America up to then--maybe it's here, I don't know--but it seemed to me that people are always looking to authority, always looking for authority someplace. And there, for the first time, I began to see people looking within themselves for their own authority. And some of these people would say, "Well, you know, I believe so-and-so." They don't say, "Well, so-and-so said such and such," as I've been accustomed to hear. For the first time I felt that there people looked to themselves for authority and that probably was instinctively one of the reasons I wanted to go there. I wanted to see a Br--I met Brancusi, by the way. I went right away to meet Brancusi. But here's a Brancusi, an authentic artist in himself, standing on his own two feet, not looking somewhere else for something. He is



himself on his own two feet. And that was one of the great experiences that I found in Europe.

ROGERS: Now, you mentioned that you had met Henry Moore very early, within the first weeks that you came to Europe.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was the first landing; I first landed in London. It wasn't the first weeks; it was the first day.

ROGERS: I'm interested in your impressions of actually meeting him and seeing his work.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was let down, actually, because I had thought . . . You know, Herbert Read has been the great exponent and the great projector of Henry Moore to the point where he became almost a mythological figure. Suddenly I met him as a person, saw his studio, and saw some of the work around the studio. Although I still found him a very interesting artist, I lost all this former feeling that I had about him. I felt right away, "Well, he's humanized something," and I didn't know what it was. Then later I found out it was Arp. So Arp was the real source of the idea.

ROGERS: Herbert Read talks a lot about Henry Moore's vitalism and making inert matter come to life. Did you get that feeling when you talked to him? Did you see that in his work?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, we'd had a chance to see Henry Moore actually, the real things, I mean, the actual



things. I'd seen a big exhibition in San Francisco before I left, and I'd seen various pieces, and I always felt, you know, this is marvelous work. But I felt more impressed than I do now because now I'm looking for something other than what he has to say, because I feel that he is a step away from the source of the idea. But notwithstanding, I mean, he's made a fantastic life and a creative life and a wonderful production. But I don't consider him in the same way I did before.

Whereas with Brancusi, when I went into his studio, it was even more so. I was just agog. I mean, I can't express how I felt when I went into his studio. There was no--how do you say?--no quarter; it was that limit of sensibility.

ROGERS: Could you understand the statement that he was making and feel very close to him. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: You see, I had a feeling from two or three words, just two or three sentences of Stephen Pepper when I was--I guess I was a junior when I took that aesthetics course. I just remember Stephen Pepper, on a very hot day--he was perspiring--I was sitting in about the third row, and he was talking about Brancusi, saying how he had made a metaphor of a bird in flight by a simple off-parallel piece of wood, that he arranged it without any kind of representation at all, and yet it was what he wanted; it said what he wanted it to say. And this is what I felt when I went into the studio, you know, in Brancusi's





studio. In fact, I met him twice in his studio. (And he was very old then, and he died when I was in Paris.) But right in the center was this unending column; it went right up through the ceiling. And he has in his spirit, the most contemporary--not relating directly to mathematics or to physics, but he has within him the kind of thing that brought about such a person as Einstein. Do you understand?

ROGERS: Yes, I think so.

FALKENSTEIN: But Henry Moore, no, no, that's something else.

ROGERS: Brancusi did so much to make modern sculpture into--well, removing it from its base; that's the only way I can think of it.

FALKENSTEIN: No, not at all. He does elaborate bases which are sculptures in themselves. As a matter of fact . . .

ROGERS: Well, he treats the base in a different way. It isn't a barrier between the viewer . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, it's not a barrier, because it becomes a sculpture, too. But he uses a base; and as I spoke earlier to you about bases, they mean something because what they do is to--how do you say?--assist the work in speaking. Whereas if it becomes too much a part of the environment, you don't see it. You have to have some degree of distance.

ROGERS: What about the pieces that don't have any base at all?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, if they don't, then they have something in themselves that keeps the distance. I mean, I'm just thinking about suspended pieces and wall pieces; they have some way of being treated so that you do have the distance between them and yourself. They aren't a common object. They aren't so common that they're just like--I know Arp says, "I want my sculpture to be like that rock that's just there: you see it or you don't see it." But I notice Arp is very careful about every one of his sculptures that has this sense of mystery and distance so that you can really see it. It's not a rock; it's a sculpture.

ROGERS: He gave a great deal of thought to the kind of base. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, I had the philosophy for a long time that I didn't want that. And the reason the philosophy came was through some kind of social attitude of wanting to unite with people and wanting people to be part of the whole thing, wanting man to be within nature, and nature to be within the work, and everything to be together. [laughter] But now I have something else in mind. I think that's true, but then I think also that the work of art is a creation of man or woman--how can you say it?--which is not nature. It's an extension of nature, and we have to show that, that it's not nature.

ROGERS: Then the pieces that are made by some modern sculptors where you can walk in them, around, and sit



on them and almost feel a part of them--they're performing, they're making an entirely different kind of statement.

FALKENSTEIN: I think so. They're playthings. They're like children's play sculpture.

ROGERS: Like the new fountain in San Francisco where you can walk around.

FALKENSTEIN: That's a very bad fountain, by the way. I think that's a very bad, bad fountain--that little stairway, that inappropriate railing, and everything about it. I think it's one with the greatest lack of sensibility of anything I've ever seen, practically. Using square--you know, it's fashionable to be geometric. So he's geometric in the way he wants the water to flow--geometrically. He puts it through square conduits, and the poor water piddles out--I guess you've seen it. You may like it; I don't. You like it?

ROGERS: I haven't seen it. I would like to experience walking around in it. I thought that would be an interesting experience.

FALKENSTEIN: But it's not that much of a thing to walk in. It's only about--what is it?--twenty feet, no, not even twenty feet high, fifteen feet high, something like that. What you do is just walk up and around and they have this very funny little jerry-built stairway that you walk on. I mean, it's not an organic. . . . Now with Gaudi it's different. With Gaudi, you really have a sense of





participation--and I wouldn't call his play sculpture either. With Gaudi, it's this sense of nature and really being part of nature, having the organic flow, that you are part of the organic flow. But not this--this is all fashionable, a very immediate use of geometry in relation to something that should have been organic.

ROGERS: When you were in Brancusi's studio, did you have an opportunity to have any conversations with him?

FALKENSTEIN: He wouldn't talk. [laughter] You know, as usual I had my photographs. I just love the way I had the temerity to carry my photographs all over. Most of the photographs were of these wood pieces and a few other things, but there were not too many. I had about ten photographs that I always carried around. So I started to pull them out, and he says, "I know, take them away." He didn't want to look. And this I can understand, I can really understand now. At that time I wanted some kind of communion with the master, you know. But one never, never, never, never gets over one's own vision, and you don't want it intruded upon. And I don't want mine intruded upon either. I don't like to have people come and show me their work either.

ROGERS: But you're constantly exposed to other people's work. Even subconsciously you're exposed as you go around every day in the city and see other people's pieces.

FALKENSTEIN: Where?



ROGERS: Well, any outdoor sculpture that you might see.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there isn't very much.

ROGERS: No, but even--well, when you're in a studio or a museum.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I agree that you do look, but you're very selective and you don't pay attention to much. You're selective and look at something that really interests you, but you just don't look at everything and take everything in at all. And if you did, you'd go crazy. You just can't. You just haven't got the strength nor the time nor the energy to just be omnivorous. You have to be selective.

ROGERS: Is it like living in that room in Paris that you needed to just be away and just do it yourself without any outside input at all?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had outside input, but it wasn't the kind of harassment of daily living. That's what I tried to say. You know how you have all these commitments. Can you imagine cutting them all off, if you had a passion, a strong passion to do something--just cut off everything and just do it? Well, that's what I did. But that doesn't mean that I cut myself off from input. Because when I first arrived in Europe, when I traveled over Europe, I went into every museum; I went into every church; I met all the artists; I went into their studios. But I also tried to participate by showing my work, and not any of them were particularly interested. [laughter]



ROGERS: Perhaps they had the same rationale that you did, that they just didn't want to see too much of anybody else's.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right. I agree, I really think so.

ROGERS: It's very interesting.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. The night before last I went to an opening at Tortue Gallery. I had seen one example on a poster of the work, and I didn't know how I'd react. I found it quite delightful and quite interesting. But I could only look at about two things. I just went like that and concentrated on one or two things.

ROGERS: Who was showing?

FALKENSTEIN: [Robert] Natkin.

ROGERS: Well, we've talked about a lot of different subjects, and we still haven't gotten into what you were doing between the fifties and sixties, which I was hoping that we would get to.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, yes, we did.

ROGERS: We're up to about . . .

FALKENSTEIN: . . . about '54, when I went to Rome. You see, I'd had this experience of working with metal to the point where I did the Sign of Leda--that was '53--and that's where I got my technique for the wire structure. Up to that time I had thought more of design rather than structure. And so I had that piece to take with me to Rome; that show in Rome was a big international show,



and I went to Rome with it. And there I received a commission from Moretti for a stair sculpture. There's not a picture of it here, but it was a stair sculpture related to this one at Stadler. See, I was there, and he was just organizing the gallery called Galleria Spazio, and he asked me if I would be willing to do a stair sculpture for his gallery. Stadler's stair sculpture was 1955.

ROGERS: Yes, there is a picture of the gallery. I have seen it.

FALKENSTEIN: So instead of going back to Paris, as I had anticipated, just for the show, I stayed on. So then, when I got back to Paris, well, that was when I began to prepare myself to come back to America, which I did, I came back in '55.

ROGERS: That was when you only stayed for just a very short period of time.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that was when I first came back. That was the first time after I had left--that was five years. And then I returned. I decided I didn't want to stay any more. [tape recorder turned off]

I think probably for the first time I began to have a sense of spiritual quality in a piece, spiritual in the sense of direct total work, not just a breaking up of space or of design or of ambiguous meaning. This was a very direct and very powerful mythological subject which I expressed in my own way.





ROGERS: This is the Sign of Leda.

FALKENSTEIN: Sign of Leda. And not only did it express it as to contour and image, but also in the way it was done. It was done in a very organic, a very, almost like tendrils of . . .



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ROGERS: When we were discussing the Sign of Leda, you said that it was a new direction for you. Would you like to enlarge on that and tell us what your feelings were after you had finished it?

FALKENSTEIN: I had a great friend in Paris by the name of Michel Tapié, who was active in projecting artists. He had been the one right after the war to discover [Jean] Dubuffet and [Philippe] Hosiasson and a few others who were, he felt, adding to art, I mean adding to the direction or continuing the direction as opposed to cubism. And he developed an idea of the informel--I don't know whether you ever heard of it, but it was a direction opposed to cubism. Of course, Picasso was dominating the scene, and here were all these other artists springing up with something else, a new attitude towards the world, and especially affected by the war. And when I had gone there, I had met him, as I told you, when I was hammering away on that log. It seems to me we talked about him before. By 1953 he used to come regularly to my studio.

I had been invited to show at the Musée Bourdelle as an American (it was an international show). I did a twelve-foot sculpture out of iron rod and it was the Sign of Leda. But it was just simply like a linear drawing but twelve



feet high and kinetic, with these two elements related to each other and in juxtaposition for motion. Well, he saw it, and he said, "Well, Claire, why don't you do one about three feet high and have it cast in bronze?" Well, to me that was beyond anything I could ever think of. I had no money to cast in bronze. I mean, it was an impossibility. I was living on a shoestring, and the materials were just the minimal thing. I mean, I had a roof over my head and food and then the materials. That was when I began using stovepipe wire. So instead of casting it in bronze, I developed it by brazing iron wire to get my dimensions and my forms. Well, out of poverty, then, came this technique. He was absolutely overjoyed. He never had thought of anything like it or seen anything like it in his life. And he says, "Well, that's so much more interesting than a bronze casting, because here you have the direct method; the direct thought is not interfered with, as with the intermediary of a craftsman in doing a casting." So that is what I mean by how it became very organic, in the expression of the technique as well as the symbolism of the image. So in the direct symbol you had something, but also in the technique which turned out to be fantastically organic. Then also what I was able to do was to imply form, but have transparency, 'cause the thing turned out to be a completely see-through structure. And that was the beginning. That was the first time I ever tried anything





like that. Now, that was in '53. And in '54, that was the piece I took to Rome to exhibit. It's very interesting because [Andrew] Richey came from the Museum of Modern Art to look at that show and wanted to buy it; but I said, "No, it belongs to Michel." 'Cause Michel Tapié had commissioned it, and I just assumed that because he'd paid me for it, it was his. Then I told Michel Tapié that this man at the Museum of Modern Art had come and wanted it, and he said, "Well, why didn't you say yes?" I said, "But it's yours." He said, "You could do something else for me, and that would have been nice for you to have in the museum."

ROGERS: Very generous.

FALKENSTEIN: But in a way it's kind of interesting that it's in his collection in Paris, in Michel Tapié's collection in Paris. In fact, now it's in Torino at the International Center of Aesthetic Research.

ROGERS: Well, why didn't Mr. Richey take it back to New York?

FALKENSTEIN: I wouldn't give it to him. I said, "No, you can't buy it, because it's already sold." Well, anyway, it was the beginning then of a direction and technique, and after that I went into the Sun Series. I found with the Leda piece that it was a very difficult technical feat that I had done, because when I would make extended forms into space, every time I would heat the material to do my brazing, they would become soft and fall down, and I would



have to heat it up and bring them up again--it was a constant kind of adjustment. So I thought, "Well, what I have to do are forms which will hold each other." And that's why the Suns were a natural, because they would support the shapes--the actual form would not be out in space, unsupported. So I did about, oh, I don't know, twenty-five or twenty-six Suns finally, because it went into several years. I started in '54, and finally I was doing them in '63 (I believe the last one I did was around, well, around that time, yes).

ROGERS: Now, when you put together a form to create your Sun, let's say, do you start from the center and work out?

FALKENSTEIN: No, you see, this is a different technique. You're thinking of my Points. The Suns are hollow; they're open; they're shields; they're screens. See, this is screen technique. I make screens (or skeins of wire which act as screens), and it's an open structure, like a screen structure. It's really curvilinear planes. That's what it is. But in working from the center out, that's with the Points, because that is a continuing structure, almost like a mass; but the others are air, just air.

ROGERS: What I was referring to is some of the later ones where you do have some masses inside that you wove these skeins around.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, if there's anything inside, it's like something that exists as a unit and is existing in air.



It's a different attitude and completely another point of view about structure.

ROGERS: You said that they collapsed when you heated them and that you had to figure out a way of structurally holding them up. How did you solve that problem?

FALKENSTEIN: Just by the form. For instance, in Leda, if you look at the book here, you see the shapes. You see this shape goes up into space. It's unsupported. It's like an arm, if you want to think of it as an arm. This shape comes up here almost like a long neck. These forms come out here like arms, out here almost like legs, out in space--it's hard to see that from that photo. But they are unsupported members in space. Now, this is a Sun and there is no unsupported member; it becomes a completely supported frame of curvilinear planes.

ROGERS: You mentioned that you had gone to the Musée Bourdelle. Is that the first time Sign of Leda was exhibited?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but it was exhibited as a linear drawing in space, and it was twelve feet high, whereas this actual piece that you look at there is only about three feet high.

ROGERS: I see. And was this smaller one exhibited, too?

FALKENSTEIN: The first time was in Rome in '54; so I must have exhibited it at that museum, the Bourdelle Museum, in around '52.

ROGERS: What kind of reaction were you getting from this



work besides from Michel Tapié?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I was being hassled. Some of the artists were very interested. Some of the critics were interested. But then I got some terrible criticisms, too, because I was feeling my way into an unknown territory. You see, when he said do a bronze casting--well, they're used to bronzes, bronze casting as a form or ceramics or something. But to do a thing out of brazing wire is something unknown and considered almost like a joke or something. I mean, they were thinking, "You can't be serious." But on the whole, though, there were a lot of people who liked it, because I had collectors who were buying the work in Northern Europe, like [Philippe] Dotremont, who was one of the biggest collectors in Northern Europe. One of the most important collectors in England, of the Tooth Gallery--now I don't remember his name [Power]--bought something. I mean, it was very highly selected people. I wasn't popular in the sense of a great popular approval, but just certain very highly developed collectors were buying my work. And of course this helped me in a lot of ways: it helped me psychologically; it helped me financially; it helped me in every way.

And in Rome, when I took Leda to Rome, it was so well received that I was given the commission to do the stair sculpture in the gallery. What I did there was like a linear drawing with iron rod, the way I had done that Leda first before I ever made the form.





ROGERS: And what gallery was that in?

FALKENSTEIN: Galleria Spazio, and Luigi Moretti was the one who developed it. Now, Luigi Moretti was this great Italian architect who later was working with [Pier] Nervi. The two of them had a partnership, which is very curious, because it was Moretti who built the Watergate in Washington. I don't know whether you knew it, but that's all part of the Vatican holdings, that whole system of buildings there in Washington. And he was the architect; he built that. But Luigi Moretti wanted to have a modern gallery in Rome, and he called it Spazio. He had published for several years a magazine called Spazio, and now he did a gallery called Spazio. So when I took my piece there--see, I went to Rome with the piece, and he met me, and it would take about a month before the gallery would be open, and so he said, "Claire, I'm going to give you commission to do some work in the gallery." And I said, "What?" He said, "I want a stair railing." And I said, "Well, I'll make a model, and I'll think about it." So I thought about it, and I thought, "Why don't I do a railing? Why don't I do a sculpture from the floor to the ceiling so that when you walk up the stairs you can hold onto it?" So I did this. I did a model, and he saw it. He said, "You know what I would like? I'd like some glass in it, so that when the sun comes through the door, it will cast color onto the floor and into the air." And that's when I



began to use glass. That was in '54, and it was Moretti who said he wanted this particular effect. And I said, "Well, I don't mind using glass. As a matter of fact, I think your idea is very good. But I will not make flat planes of glass and incorporate them in any way. If I do use glass, it will have to be fused with the structure." And that's when I got the idea of fusion. So I said, "It has to be heated and melted within the structure itself. Ask your engineers how I can do that and where I can do it." So he asked them, and they said, "It's impossible, it's impossible, because the index of cooling is so different between metal and glass. When they cool, the glass will just fly off." Well, so I took my torch and did a small structure out of iron wire and melted glass onto it with my torch. And it worked. But that was only on one side, see. So when I turned the structure around and I melted glass on the other side, the flame would go through and make the glass on the other side fall off by explosion, because of the heat. So I realized what I had to do was to put it in the kiln and do it all at once, just put the glass within the structure and let it work that way. So I happened to become acquainted with some people in Rome who had a kiln, and I said, "Would you let me use your kiln, because I have an idea I'd like to carry through?" And they said okay. So I made one almost like that Sun, kind of an oval shape about thirteen or fourteen inches



wide with a really sort of dense structure, not dense but a through structure, structure all the way through, not just a shell. I filled it with glass and put it in the kiln, and we fired it, and it was marvelous. It came out just fine. Well, it was marvelous but it wasn't perfect, in the sense that not everything adhered, and as time went on it would flick off from time to time. But enough stayed so it was the effect that I wanted. And I incorporated that in the sculpture. That was the first time, and it worked. I mean, it worked enough. But I knew that I had to go on and continue to experiment to try to make it more perfect and more interesting and use larger--for instance, this was all very small pieces of glass, and I thought, "Well, if I use some big chunks, what will happen?" So I started then to explore the possibilities of larger pieces of glass. And then I began to use copper, and copper was much more amenable to the glass and the melting and the cooling. Don't ask me why--I don't know--but it is. So I used copper tubing and glass. I think the tube, because it was hollow, cooled in a different way from a solid piece, and that helped. So now finally I've gotten to the point where I can do large pieces and have fantastic results with large chunks of glass and copper tubing. But do you know how long that's been? It's been since '54. That's twenty-three years that I've been working on this thing.





ROGERS: Well, when you do the stair rail . . .

FALKENSTEIN: It's not a railing; it was a sculpture from floor to ceiling.

ROGERS: . . . sculpture, you had to put that in the kiln, didn't you?

FALKENSTEIN: I'm telling you, I put a section in, and then I incorporated it.

ROGERS: Oh, I see. You didn't put the whole thing in. You broke it up in pieces and then welded it together after it was . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I incorporated it.

ROGERS: I see. So that's how you got the glass in the gates that you did for the Princess. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: That's different, because what I did there--now, see, that was later. That was '57. We've gone several years now ahead. But in '57, no, in '56--see, when I had found out about how to do this--see, in '55 I went back to America and then I came back to Europe and I continued to work in this way, that is, a direct welding with iron. And a very curious thing happened. I had been showing--I had shown at a group show at Galerie Rive Droite. That was in '56; that was my first show in Paris, where I had had a group of things together, and I showed with three men (it was like a four-artist show at the Galerie Rive Droite). At that time I had finished--see, evidently I started in '55, and I had finished a thing called Homage



to Gaudi. And this Homage to Gaudi, how this happened was very funny. I had never seen [Antonio] Gaudi. I'd only seen reproduction of Gaudi, but I loved him. He still is controversial. I don't know whether you know that, but there is this attitude that he is nonarchitectural; he is sculptural but nonarchitectural. It's because of this continuing attitude for cubism and for the geometry rather than for the organic--I mean, geometry in the sense of the straight line and the angles and so on, and the cube. Well, so I had a great argument with the dealer--what was his name?--Larcade, Jean Larcade. Of course he only liked, at that time, Le Corbusier. And he was absolutely vehemently against Gaudi. I just happened to come in on the conversation, and I said, "I love Gaudi. I'm going to make an Homage to Gaudi." And that's what started me. So I went home and I started an Homage to Gaudi, which ended up as a twelve-foot sculpture. And on that I fused glass with a torch, all over it. So that was '56. I remember I had gone down to Venice to the Biennale--this is kind of a . . . I had met all these people at the Biennale, and among them was Katharine Kuh. [##] Well, this happened at that time.

So in '57 we were all invited to Barcelona. There were about eight or nine artists from Paris, and we were all invited to Barcelona for a big international show. It was the first international show of contemporary arts



since Franco had come in, 'cause he, like Hitler, was against contemporary art. I don't know whether you knew that. So they were going to have paintings, and they said, "Well, look, we can't have sculpture." And here I was in Galerie Stadler. See, I went into Galerie Stadler in '55 (that's when he opened the gallery). And they said, "We're sorry, Claire, but we really can't send you because you are a sculptor, and it's just too expensive." I said, "Well, I'll do it then. I'll take my own sculpture. I'll pay for it, and I'll take it myself. I'll accompany it to get it over the border." That was another thing--they said we could never get it over the border. So I had it packed in a nice box twelve feet long, and I rode on the train with it to Barcelona. No--oh, I know what I had to do. I had to get off at the border and check it with my passport. And when I got off, the box that my sculpture was supposed to be in was a square box. I said, "That's not my sculpture. My sculpture is twelve feet long." So I had to wait on the border, I think it was about eight hours or so, for the next train to come in, because they had gotten the boxes mixed up. So it was good I accompanied it, you know. I remember chasing around with these guys. You know, I discovered that if you really want to get something done, you just have to do it yourself, that's all, especially if it's in crucial things like getting things over the border and that sort of thing.



So I got it to Barcelona, and it was shown as an Homage to Gaudi. Well, this was fantastic, because Barcelona is the home, and that's where Gaudi did all his work. So I was really much appreciated in that show. And I remember [Joan] Pratts, who was the director of the Friends of Gaudi--I hope I can find the book, but he dedicated a little book to me. It's here someplace.

[tape recorder turned off] Some people were so distraught about Gaudi because they loved Le Corbusier. But suddenly Corbusier began to appreciate Gaudi, and he wrote a book on Gaudi. Corbusier was influenced by Gaudi, and his later work becomes organic, and he just derived an awful lot from Gaudi forms. Here's the catalog--I mean, the notice of that show in Barcelona. And you see, Joan Pratts was the one who was the leader--what would you call him?--the president of the Friends of Gaudi. And he says, "En homage de Claire Falkenstein, une camarade dans l'admiration de Gaudi."

ROGERS: What does that translate into English?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, "In homage to Claire Falkenstein, a comrade, a friend, in the admiration of Gaudi." And then his name. But it was because I took this thing, this sculpture.

Well, then that sculpture went on to--I was there for about ten days, and so then I left. I took the old Volcania, which was an old big ship, a big passenger ship, and went





to . . . See, that was in the winter, the spring rather, of '57, February of '57. So then the whole show went on to Madrid, and I took this ship and went to Naples. It was the cheapest way, because otherwise I'd go on a train and have to go all the way around; so I took this ship. I just went across the water there and got to Naples. From Barcelona it was very easy. So I got off in Naples and saw the museum, which is a marvelous museum there, and then I took a train to Rome. I called Moretti and told him I had just been to Barcelona and about the show. And he said, "Claire, we've had something on our drawing boards for six months, and we can't solve it. We need a magical gate for a grotto for a villa we're building for the Princess Pignatelli on the northern Tyrrhenian Sea at Santa Marinella. Would you like to do it?" And I said sure. So right then and there, right in front of him, I said, "I have some ideas," and I just sat down and drew several ideas. And he says, "Well, that's the one." Then I had a friend in Rome who let me use her terrace and I got a gasoline torch, and I made a model within three or four days. I have the model now in my studio; I'll show it to you. And I made it on that terrace. So then he accepted it. And I went out to Santa Marinella and established myself, didn't get out of there for four months, and forged these gates. I had a helper. There they are.

ROGERS: Was the Princess Pignatelli there?



FALKENSTEIN: Yeah. Everybody was having a hell of a good time, and here I was working very hard, and I thought, "Well, I'd rather be me."

ROGERS: Could you recreate the scene a little bit about the American woman walking up to the princess?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I didn't consider myself the American woman doing anything. I just thought of myself as an artist doing these gates and having a helper and having an engineer and having the possibility of a good architect to work with. I mean, all I thought of was, "Here are these people, they live here, and I just hope it will be a congenial situation for me to work." And it wasn't too bad. It was pretty nice, really. They left me alone, and once in a while we'd have some champagne in the evening before I went back to . . . I lived in the pension over there and ate, and I would come over, then go back for lunch, then come back afterwards. I just had a full day, about an eight-hour day, for four months, working on this.

ROGERS: Well, what were the logistics of working? You were really kind of in the country by the seashore. How did you get all the equipment and everything you needed?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, everything was supplied to me. Anything I wanted.

ROGERS: By Moretti?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.



ROGERS: And the creation of the gates required some structural engineering as far as . . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I had an engineer.

ROGERS: I see. How did you work with him?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, what I had to do--see, I had my model, and so we had to establish what I had to do, and I saw the slant of the wall. The wall slanted back, so I had to straighten the gate. It's four feet wide on the top and one foot wide at the bottom, so it will swing. We figured out how we'd attach it to the wall, and that was one of the first things, to put in the arms which would support the gate. They're very simple, just rods. I think they're about two-inch rods put into the stone, just cemented in. And I had an engineer who established--I mean, I knew what the center was, but he had to establish it exactly, 'cause it was asymmetrical (the arch was not symmetrical). Everything about it was very organic. I mean, the walls slanted back, and the arch itself was not symmetrical, so I had to figure out everything in relation to opening and closing the gate, I mean, the working of it. Then I had to decide on the width and the thickness of the material I would use. They were strip cold rolled steel. That's what I used. I had to forge, a very simple forge, you know, just one that was hand-run. And I had a helper, a seventeen-year-old boy in the town who had never worked a forge before--but neither had I, as a matter of fact, and we found out how





to do it. [laughter] And we did it very well.

ROGERS: How did you find out?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there were several people around who knew how, and they just taught us, you know. They said, "Well, you just put the coal in and then just put your paper in and start the bellows, and pretty soon it will catch on fire, and you put your iron in and get it hot and that's all you do. Take it out and hammer it on the anvil." [laughter]

ROGERS: That was a very primitive way of working with metal, wasn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, what other way would you do it? Tell me, you say, primitive. Now, how else can you heat the metal and get it in a malleable way? I mean, you can't use a torch in the same way because you can't get the continued length of glow. I mean, you'd have to heat it this way, and by the time you got down here it wouldn't be hot here. It was very, very practical.

ROGERS: What I meant was that it fit in well with the site.

FALKENSTEIN: The only thing that was really primitive is that it wasn't electric. I think nowadays probably in forges you have everything done by machinery instead of by hand. But I kind of liked the fact that you were controlling it and getting some kind of exercise, too. It was fun.



ROGERS: From the pictures, I haven't really been able to determine where the gates go and what they open on and close off.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the reason they have to be magical, and the reason they couldn't do them on the drawing board, is because they went into this very real fieldstone. It was a grotto constructed of fieldstone, and if they did these very slick regimented gates, they looked awful. They needed something that would go with the sea and go with--see, the sea was right there, washing into the cave and into the grotto, the fieldstone, huge fieldstone, big roughhewn stone. If they had a very regular gate, you know, the conventional mode of making gates, it just was out of place.

ROGERS: Well, why did she want gates on it at all?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, in the first place, they had a passageway from the gates up to their garden, and people would come in from the sea and come on into their garden. So they had to protect themselves. And then finally they looked to the future when this would be excavated, the floor would come out and the sea would actually come in, and they could bring their boat right in. And they had to have a gate to protect it. So they had to have gates.

ROGERS: Did she see your model before you. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure.

ROGERS: Did she like it?



FALKENSTEIN: [##] They accepted whatever the architect gave them, and Moretti liked them. I felt that way about the house and everything. They accepted his taste.

Another funny thing happened with them. They were relatives--how do you say it?--descendants of Pope Innocent XII. And they wanted to do something about the medal which indicated that they were part of that family. So Moretti wanted me to make a receptacle for this medal for the house. So I made a little receptacle of silver, like a little container. They had a circular stairway in the house from the top floor which was about three floors high; it just came down, and then the end of the stair railing just came out like that. So I made a receptacle that when it came out like that, this receptacle came right under. I made a little pocket inside of this, like two little balls, in a way, and put the thing in. I kept it open in the bottom so that you could look up inside. You'd have to almost lie down and look up to see the medal. It was done very secretly, and they liked that, because it was there, and everybody knew it (I mean, just certain people knew it), and the only way you could see it would be to get down and look into it. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

In getting back to the gates, it was the first time--no, it wasn't the first time, because in '54, before I went off to Rome, I had done a part of a Sun, just a part of it.



It was a combination of the Net Structure and the Sign of the "U." And it is in here--Dotremont bought the piece--here, there it is. What is that? In 1954, Sun No. 6. And right in here--where is it?--there, right in there, is a spherical shape which is built out of the Sign of the "U." As a matter of fact, the whole thing is built on the Sign of the "U," isn't it? And then I wove my Net Structure freely through a structure of the Sign of the "U." Well, when I went on to Barcelona--see, I had done that before, and then when I finally got back to Rome and had the commission to do the gates, that was in my mind. That was in my memory of having done that one Sun that way. So when I sat down and did the gates, I simply used the structure without the net that I'd already made the Sun of. So when I began to form the gates, I made each element a kind of U which you can see fit together, not only two-dimensionally, but three-dimensionally. And this was a new concept for a gate, because there are no crossbars and so on to give strength, as in the conventional gate. But the idea is like a piece of wood where the fiber is held together with equal points of meeting. So the whole thing becomes a unit of meeting points where they touch, where the U's touch, not only two-dimensionally, but three-dimensionally.

ROGERS: When you first put these gates together and had these meeting points, did you find that there were areas of less strength that needed to be reinforced? Did it





interfere with your design?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, what I did was to follow the model. I finished the whole thing following the model. And then I went ahead and continued to work until I developed the piece more fully, to gather not only strength, but also diminish the interstices. Remember, these are gates to protect the people. We didn't want an interstice that would be large enough for a dog or a human being--a cat could go through, but not a dog or a human being. So I did have to go on after I finished with the model, because when you enlarge--see, I did the model one inch to the foot, and so finally when the thing is blown up, I had these great interstices. So I had to close them down with more structure.

ROGERS: Did you find that by having to add more to it, that it interfered with your design, or did you let it happen as you'd go along?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no, no. This is life--and that is, whenever you enlarge from a small piece, you never can do anything automatically or slavishly. You have to use your creative sense, not only from following the model--you don't even follow the model exactly. You always make adjustments, because in the enlargement, you have a completely new thing. So you use the model really as a point of departure. And as far as the design goes, well, the design was started when you started the thing. And it was just like a continuing development of an idea



rather than following a design.

ROGERS: So you stayed open-ended as far as what the end part would look like?

FALKENSTEIN: That's right, that's right.

ROGERS: The engineering of it is such that it doesn't have these cross-members that reinforce at the main elements. I'm wondering how you were able to achieve that with a random kind of welding.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it wasn't random. It's only random in the sense that it's not, let's say, a geometrical sequence, an exact geometrical sequence. Because if you study the gates, you can find a pretty even pulsation over the whole surface, and in a three-dimensional way as well, so that it's not strong because of some kind of push and pull in a diagonal line or whatever, but it's strong because of the equal points. As I say, it's like a piece of wood: if you take a piece of wood and break it up with a hammer, you'll see how the fibers are held together with joinings. They're joined together in a way that is regular but irregular, if you know what I mean, irregularly regular. And that's the way the gates are. It's a kind of system. It's a natural system of organization. And to my knowledge, that was the first time it ever has been done for a gate. Moretti was very interested in it, but he said, "Do you think it will work?" And I said, "I know it will work." And all the time I was working, he would come in



and look at it and say, "Do you think it will be strong enough?" And I said, "Of course!" And he said, "But really, Calire, you better think in terms of some kind of diagonals that will hold it." And I said, "But we don't have to. It's very strong. One square foot of that is like one square foot over the whole area. I mean, a square foot in its strength is multiplied over the whole piece because of the equal pulsation of the equal tension of the equal joining points."

ROGERS: What in your background prepared you to have this kind of insight?

FALKENSTEIN: Nothing that I know of, except I just think it's just a kind of judgment, natural judgment. Just natural. I think anybody can see that. I think probably the thing in my background that helped me was I didn't have a lot of traditional learning to undo. The engineers and all those people said it wouldn't work, see. And then it did work, and they liked it. And Moretti especially-- he just adored it. This was introduced, by the way, in Holiday once, that magazine Holiday. I have it someplace; I don't know where.

ROGERS: Do you have any idea how much they weighed when they were all through? Did the hinges hold it okay?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it wasn't that heavy.





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FALKENSTEIN: I did a film. I had my 16-millimeter camera with me while I was in Europe, and I documented a lot of this work and a lot of the action that I went through in doing it. It seems to me that it took about three men to carry them, each gate. It may have been more: maybe it was four men. And what I did was to take the gate to the point of completion insofar as the model was concerned, and then I hung it, put it on the place where it was to go, and I finished it upright. Up to that time I was working horizontally--well, it was on sawhorses. So when you finally put the gate up, it wasn't that heavy, because I hadn't developed it that much further.

However, one thing I want to tell you--see, in '54 I used the glass fusions. So Moretti again says, "Claire, it would be beautiful to look through glass to the sea. Why don't you think about using some glass?" So I went to Venice and got some glass and all of these chunks of glass that I incorporated in the gate by pressure. And that was a new thing for me. It was almost like setting a stone, because you'd have to put in in and hold it from different points--you know, get it in there and hold that chunk by combining directions of steel so that the glass would be under pressure from the various points and usually you couldn't take them out.



ROGERS: Did you have a lot of trouble trying to get the hot iron to wrap around when you put in the glass?

FALKENSTEIN: No, see, I didn't wrap around anything. What I did was to make my shapes, forging, and then I would pull the shape against the glass and then butt another piece against it so you get the glass in tension. Understand? For instance, here's a piece of glass. Here's my U. Maybe just that part of it would touch, see? Then here this part would be free; then I would take another U and come around here and not wrap it around but push against it, so here I would have the possibility of the pressure. See? And maybe I'd need at least three points. And I just figured it out as I went.

ROGERS: So you just used the raw glass without trying to melt it.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, big chunks.

ROGERS: Big chunks of glass.

FALKENSTEIN: See, I did that later in the Guggenheim gates also. Chunks. They call it coteso, which is unannealed, not annealed. Everybody says, "Oh, Claire, it will all crumble." But it hasn't.

ROGERS: You've seen the gates recently?

FALKENSTEIN: Not recently, but within several years (I mean afterwards). And I saw the Guggenheim gates this year, recently. They're all right. I did the Guggenheim gates in '61.



ROGERS: What did you do as far as researching the kinds of glass to use when Moretti suggested that you use it and you had to find out where to buy it?

FALKENSTEIN: Look, in Italy, for I don't know how many thousand, maybe three thousand years, glass has been part of their culture, because it's the Byzantine art form that Venice is. Venice is the gateway from the Orient, you knew that. So the tradition of glassmaking in Venice just goes back to the beginning, I mean just thousands of years. And it was just natural--you don't go shopping. You just take it; there it is. There it is. You just take it and use it. See? It just exists there. It's part of the whole daily living quality of Italy. Glass.

ROGERS: And you can go into a factory and just buy big hunks of different colors?

FALKENSTEIN: You don't have to even buy it. They gave them to us. Do you know that I have two tons of glass in my studio right now? Not two tons. I got two tons, and I've used up--I have about one ton. I bought 2,000 pounds just last . . . I paid for the shipping, and they sent it to me from Italy, 'cause they know me and like me and I keep going there.

ROGERS: You didn't know any Italian when you went there, did you?

FALKENSTEIN: No, but I learned, so I could work with the workers, a few words and a lot of gestures. It was very



funny; I must tell you something very funny. These workers that I worked with at the place in the grotto, I doubt whether they ever had much education, if they went what we would consider even through grade school. But they had what we consider culture in that they could sing opera. They knew all the operas, and they could sing them. And they had a kind of philosophy. They could talk about their philosophy with gestures and a few words that I could understand. So they were singing opera, and so they said, "Now you sing some. We've been singing. Now you sing." I tried to think of one I could sing, and the only thing I could think of was "Rock of Ages," from my childhood from the Presbyterian church.

ROGERS: Did they like that?

FALKENSTEIN: They thought it was funny. [laughter]

ROGERS: Did they have any reaction to the gates when they were all done?

FALKENSTEIN: I think they were astonished and pleased that they had a part of it. I know that when things began to happen around them, when the architect was pleased and the owners accepted them. . . . I don't know whether the owners really were highly elated, except they were, finally, because they were pretty well publicized finally, I mean in Holiday and two or three other magazines. So I think they were pleased. And the workers were interested. And, you know, they aren't so set on things; they just look,





and if it pleases them--they're more like children than. . . .

ROGERS: Now, the stairway sculpture and the gates were the first experiences you had working with architects, weren't they?

FALKENSTEIN: Wait now, let me think if I ever had any other before that. No, I had two commissions in America. Remember I told you about the commission I did, that was not accepted, for the Laurel Hills cemetery? That was for a landscape architect. Then I did another commission for a landscape architect, Bob Royston, for a garden sculpture, which I forgot to tell you about, in San Francisco. That piece was shown in Los Angeles quite a few years later and was bought by Mrs. Brody.

ROGERS: Is this Mrs. Sidney Brody?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, it's here, this early, early piece. I don't know that it still exists, but it was in her garden. It was bought in the fifties.

ROGERS: And what did that look like?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was a mobile, and it was mobile in relation to water and in relation to a whole garden. I did not do the garden. Garrett Eckbo did the garden, later, when it was used by her, and Bob Royston did the original garden.

ROGERS: The reason I brought that up is that this started a long association of working with architects both abroad and here.



FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I did another thing for Bob Royston! I did something for a garden on top of the cliff in Bolinas which--but these, you know, are sort of normal-size sculptures. I mean, they're no bigger than 4 feet x 2 feet x 3 feet, something like that, or 5 feet x 4 feet. But this piece [the Pignatelli gate], you see, is about 27 feet x 14 feet x 4 feet on the top, and 1 foot. . . . I mean, it's very big. It was also a very important piece in that I had quite a few people to satisfy. I had the owner, and it had to sustain itself as a protector of the garden and of the house. I mean, I had to think of myself as doing something very strong and stable to hold the situation, to be useful, whereas the other things were just sculptures. So it was in Europe that I began to work with architecture as such, I would say. Yes.

ROGERS: What did these gates lead to then? After you finished in Italy, you moved back to Paris?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. I went back to Paris. See, now, that was '57. I was invited at the end, when I finished those. I finished those in the early fall, then I was invited by Garrett Eckbo to represent sculpture at the International Design Conference in Aspen, Colorado. That was '58. I mean, I would have been there in '58, but I was invited, I think, at the end of '57. See, I had just finished these gates, and I took the model with me. And I also had a film, the film, and I showed the film at the conference, doing the



gates. So I had to write a statement of my ideas and so on and do a presentation at the conference. And in '56-- or was it '57?--I guess I'd been in America in '57. I don't know how to do this. I remember I was at a party in San Francisco, and Gurdon Woods was at the party, and he invited me to come and teach at the school, 'cause he was director of the San Francisco Art Institute, if I would come back the next year. And see, it all worked in, because I came back to represent sculpture in Aspen, and then I came on over to San Francisco and stayed in San Francisco all of '58 and taught at the school again (see, that was the same place I'd taught before). Then I had an exhibition at the [San Francisco] Museum of Art and an exhibition at Bolles Gallery. And then the museum invited me to lead the tour through France, so I did. And that led then to the following year of leading the tour through Italy, and then finally it led to these commissions here, and I came here.

ROGERS: How did you become associated with the Galerie Stadler?

FALKENSTEIN: Well in '55, he opened his gallery in Paris. In '54, or '53, I think, I met him, 'cause he was looking around for space 'cause he wanted to open a gallery. He was a young Swiss who had just finished the university. He'd studied law, because he always wanted to open a gallery in Paris, but his father, who was a very important industrialist in Switzerland, wanted his son to follow in the business.





But Rodolphe didn't want to. He wanted to open a gallery. So the father said, "I'll help you, I'll support you, and you can do what you want, but first you have to finish a profession so that I'll know that you'll always be able to really have something to fall back on if you need to." So he finished in law. Then he came to Paris and through a friend, met Michel Tapié. In the meantime, I had known Michel Tapié, so I met him when I first got there as a matter of fact. So Michel Tapié then offered--I mean he asked Michel Tapié if he'd help him as an artistic counselor to help him open a gallery, to advise him and help him collect artists, get artists and so on. So I was the first. I had done that piece in Rome, see, for Moretti, for the stairway. So Rodolphe said, "Why don't you do one for me, for my gallery, my new gallery." So I said okay, and I did one for him. And he opened that gallery, and he still has it. And I have had about five shows, four or five shows . . . well, I've been in lots of group shows, but I mean one-person shows, let's see, one-artist shows--what do you call it?

ROGERS: A one-man show.

FALKENSTEIN: Right, we don't want to say that. Solo shows. Well, my first solo show in Paris was '56, I told you. That was at Rive Droite. That was when I showed Homage to Gaudi and then went on to Spain and so on. And my first show, then, was a year later in '57. So evidently I came back



from Venice and had a show in Paris. I mean, I came back from Rome after I finished the gates and had a show in Paris. I'm going to have to look at some of my documents to find out what dates, but I had a show in Stadler in '57 and also in Torino, also in Rome.

Then I went on to America in '58 for that whole year. In fact, in '58 I was trying to find out if I could go back to San Francisco and work as an artist. And I found I couldn't. Impossible.

ROGERS: We talked about how you did an experiment. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: But it got me there. My fare was paid by the art conference. It was paid there. And then it was paid back 'cause I was going to lead the tour.

ROGERS: Among the small group of Americans living in Paris at that time, were you the only one that was working in sculpture?

FALKENSTEIN: Only one. No, I tell you, there may have been other Americans there who worked in sculpture, but they weren't of that exodus from America at that time. They had been living there before.

ROGERS: You did do some painting, though, didn't you?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure, and I still do.

ROGERS: How did the [mural] for Donald Olson come about?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, when I was here during '58--no, I did that in '56, so it was when I was here in '55--Donald Olson said, "Claire, I'm building my house and I would love to



have you do a painting for the stairwell, twenty feet high and ten feet wide" (something like that). And I said sure, as usual. And I went back and rented a room, 'cause I had to find space to do it. I did it and then shipped it. It's up, still up there. In fact, I really should go over there and look at that now and see what I think of it. I should have told my gang--I forgot about that when we were all up there doing the documentary and filming everything I could think of, I forgot all about that. All of this is so hard to remember. But that was done in '56.

ROGERS: When someone commissions you to do a piece like that, they leave it entirely up to you to do whatever--you didn't see the place where it was going to be?

FALKENSTEIN: I only had blueprints and descriptions, 'cause it hadn't been built yet.

ROGERS: So you just had a space 20 x 10 that you were going to be filling?

FALKENSTEIN: Except I knew the ambience. I knew it was going to be a stairwell with stairs going up in relation to it. I think there's a picture in here of it, isn't there?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Now you see, as an example--there--I couldn't find a room big enough to do the whole thing upright. I had to do one, and then I had to do the other. But it wasn't cut. It was just simply laid on the floor. So



you had to imagine that this was going to go out twenty feet, so this was ten feet, and then over here was ten feet, and this was ten feet. No--it doesn't look like ten, it looks like eight feet, doesn't it? So I broke it because I wanted a sense of the stairway going here and then over here, 'cause it had to move, and I wanted a variety. It worked pretty well.

ROGERS: And you did get to see it?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure. I've seen it several times. But I haven't seen it recently. Oh, my God, that was . . .

ROGERS: Now, you'd been working with the wire in Paris. Then you came back to the United States and discovered that you really no longer felt comfortable in San Francisco or even in America.

ROGERS: It wasn't a matter of being comfortable. It was a matter of earning my living. There were no collectors. There was no possibility of . . . Over there I had a contract with a gallery. I was supported. I had some of the biggest collectors in Europe buying me every time I gave a show. I had an architect in Rome who would use me. I mean, I was being supported. Here--what could you do? You could teach, and even that wasn't enough to take care of you, because the amount of money you'd make teaching was very little.

ROGERS: But couldn't you have started--after all, you were established in Europe and you had some reputation.





Didn't that follow you? Couldn't you set up a studio in San Francisco?

FALKENSTEIN: I set up a studio. That doesn't mean a damn thing. Look, do you know, I'm established here, but luckily in Los Angeles there's more activity among collectors. I don't have a money contract with a gallery here. I just depend upon sales and commissions. Up there it was impossible. There was nothing going on as far as supporting the artist. Nothing.

ROGERS: No type of art? Not even in a realistic, traditional kind of art or something?

FALKENSTEIN: [##] In America it isn't this thing that you have in Europe where there is this long tradition of the love of art. How many people do you know in your life who really collect for the love of it? Or who collect, period? [##]

ROGERS: Not very many. Course, it costs a lot of money to collect, too.

FALKENSTEIN: No, it doesn't. It's only in your mind, because you spend money on other things. [##] See, it's a life force. It's a real touch upon the nerve of life. That's what art is. And not many people are awakened to that. . . . Ask a question. [laughter]

ROGERS: I was thinking about what you were saying. Because it is true that you have to be drawn to it for the sheer love of it and not to depend on somebody else to tell you, "Now, this is art and you ought to buy it." It has to be



something that comes from within them.

FALKENSTEIN: It has to be a thing of development. You can start out and make mistakes. Later on you may not like what you bought, so therefore you can get rid of it. I mean, your taste develops, or your direction or whatever you want to say develops, so it becomes more and more secure. I have a friend in Paris who is American [Peggie Dwight], and she buys rather modestly, some prints and some small paintings, and she has now three of my sculptures. She bought one in America at Gallery Mayer when I had a show there in '69, and carried it on an airplane and got it through customs. Then she bought something from Galerie Stadler. And then this time she bought something from out of my studio in Paris. And she doesn't have much money. She's just kind of a very modest-living person. She doesn't even have a car or anything. But she loves art, and she's got her home--she has a beautiful, simple, wonderful apartment in Paris, and I don't know what she would do without these things that she's bought. I mean, that's her life; they give her life. And as time goes on, she gets to be acquainted with the artist, and she finds something that she just likes like that. And her whole place is just rich with this tactile and sensuous kind of thing.

ROGERS: What kind of quality do you think it takes in a person to be able to buy art? Let's say, what criteria would you set up for someone if they were going to go and



start a collection in art, just buy what they like?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I just have a feeling that when you begin to live with art--see, that's why I like to talk to these groups when they come through my place. Here I have things all over integrated with everything. Frankly, I don't know what I would do without being able to live with my work. I prefer to live with my own work. I'll go to the museum, and I'll see other things, or I'll go to the gallery--but to me it's an ongoing experience of my work that I'm doing. Now, a collector, it would be something else. It would be an ongoing experience, sure, and he or she would go into kinds of directions at different times of his or her life--maybe abstract expressionist for a time, or maybe geometrical abstraction or something, whoever, whatever. But finally, as time went on, he or she would be surrounded with these things that would become like life-giving forces to their living. And they would never be able to live without it again, I mean if they once are able to be awakened to what happens to you. It's civilizing; it's uplifting; it's broadening; it's deepening one's experience in living.

ROGERS: Well, it's a form of expression for them, too.

FALKENSTEIN: That's what I mean. It opens up the passages of the mind, it develops the vision, and it gives you warmth and pleasure and excitement. Don't forget excitement, sheer excitement.





ROGERS: You said that you have all your own things in your own home. Do you collect any other artist at all?

FALKENSTEIN: No.

ROGERS: You've never traded with anybody else?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. I've not traded very much. I've traded with Giacometti. You see, I don't like to trade unless I love the work of somebody else, because I just don't like to have it, but I like to think about it. For instance, I have Giacometti. You haven't been upstairs in my apartment, but I have Giacometti up there. I'm trying to think of anybody else I've traded with. I have two or three [Antonio] Tapiés things. See, all these happened in Europe. I haven't done any trading here in America.

ROGERS: That's a very common thing for artists to trade back and forth, and I'm curious to know why you don't have anything of anybody else's.

FALKENSTEIN: But I do. I have Giacometti, and I have Tapiés, and I have quite a few, but they're European.

ROGERS: Yes, I meant--well, you've lived in the United States now for about thirteen years . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Twelve years.

ROGERS: . . . twelve years. When you were in Aspen and in San Francisco in 1958, did you see a change in the art that was coming through in America? Did you see anybody or meet with people that were relating to the kind of work you were doing? What kind of a reception did you get?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, among a certain kind of person I got a good reception, and among another kind of person I've always gotten a very poor reception. And it has to do with the direction in which people are going. It's interesting, because officially, here in Los Angeles, I have not had too good a reception--officially. But unofficially, I've had a marvelous reception. It has to do with the curators in museums who are tuned in to something else than what I'm doing. But the fact that I've been able to do the more public work--I mean, I've done more by public commissions than anybody I know--is to me a very interesting thing, that I've tuned in on something that is very good in relation to nonofficial work. When I say "official," I mean the museums. Now, I have had some museums who are very helpful and very sustaining. For instance, San Diego, Long Beach, Phoenix. It's only the Los Angeles museum really that has been very--how would you say?--obdurate. That's a nice way of putting it. [laughter]

ROGERS: Inasmuch as we've touched on it, why don't we talk about the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and its role on the community? Do you believe that they represent the art of this environment? Do you believe the museum does?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I have a feeling that it's rather precious--the museum is rather precious--because of the



people there who are the curators and so on. I don't know what is the point of view, frankly, what is in their minds. But it seems to me that it's a very hard thing to understand what it is they want, what they are pushing. I know that it's interesting to be on the avant-garde, to be on the edge of something, and therefore body art is admired. And I don't even consider body art, art. I consider it psychological, some kind of therapy in a psychological way. When people begin to maim themselves and take pictures of it and then show photographs of being maimed, I don't understand that as art particularly. I think it's psychological, some kind of psychotherapy that they're undergoing.

ROGERS: What are you referring to?

FALKENSTEIN: Body art. You know what body art is, don't you?

ROGERS: I just wondered if there's a particular show you were referring to.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know of any particular show. [##]

ROGERS: What role should a museum play in a city like Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I guess they should try to be very broad and include the broadest section. I know that in the "Art and Technology" show, there wasn't one woman, for instance. I think women now are coming more and more into the scene, but very slowly. But there's been a discrimination against women, I think.



ROGERS: Did you ever feel it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I felt it, sure.

ROGERS: Did you feel it more here than you did in Europe?

FALKENSTEIN: I think officially there I was kind of out of it, too. You know, I think that work of any real calibre is usually unofficial. When it becomes official, that means it's accepted by the Establishment. [laughter]

ROGERS: If you took a piece of your sculpture and no one knew who did it, do you think they would be able to tell that it had been done by a woman?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't believe that at all. I don't think there's any difference. I think sensibility--you know, in anthropology you learn there's more difference within the group than between the groups. And that goes for race, for sex, for everything--I mean, in expression. And I think that the variety--you could say, for instance, Botticelli is very feminine and Giotto is very masculine or something. And then you can say the same thing about women: I mean, there would be some women that will have very great strength, and another one will be more lyrical or something. I don't think there is any connection between sexual differentiation and expression. I think that women will contribute to art if they're allowed to, because of the possibility of a kind of sensibility. But I don't think that when you see the work--would you know that a man did that, or that a woman did that? Is there anything





to indicate that that's a man's or a woman's work? To you?

ROGERS: Now, you're pointing to the painting, the continuous painting that had been molded to a three-dimensional piece, two dimensions into three dimensions [Homage to Scott Joplin].

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that's a three-dimensional sculpture, by coiling the paper; it's a print, really, and it is an edition of twenty (now, that's an artist's proof, really). And do you find any sex differentiation in that? You see, I'm saying that the sensibility, the human sensibility, has such a broad spectrum that the work does not have that differentiation. Rather, it has intensity or it doesn't. have intensity. A woman can be just as intense as a man. A man can be just as delicate as a woman.

ROGERS: There's been some discussion about a woman's art being core art, that from very early times she created from the inside out. For instance, like her knitting, she would start with a small piece and then work out from there. I found that in your Point as a Set pieces you worked from the center and built out. This seemed to tie in together that way. That's why I wondered if perhaps you had a feeling that when you worked, you worked from a center, even if only the space is centered and then you work out.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that isn't. That isn't. That's one-- you've chosen one thing of my work that's like that. But do you associate that with it, with the center, with the core?



ROGERS: No, now you're referring to the . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I'm referring to the piece on the ceiling  
[Flying Piece].

ROGERS: No, I'm just asking you if you ever felt that  
you . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, no, no. I'm telling you that I don't.  
I feel that women can contribute because of sensibility,  
but it's just because they experience probably another  
facet of life. But when the work comes out, it doesn't  
necessarily reflect an entirely different attitude towards  
the externalization of their sensibility than a man. I  
don't think so. I just feel that there's more variation  
within the female sensibility than between her sensibility  
and a man's sensibility. A man could have done that, a  
man could have done that. Or a woman could. A woman did.  
[laughter] And especially nowadays. For instance, women  
have been excluded from professions by men, I mean just by  
a constant kind of putting down. I'm thinking about the  
thing of mathematics. Now women are going into mathe-  
matics; they're programming computers, you know; they're  
doing everything. There's no difference. They find  
there's no difference. They're just as intelligent,  
just as capable.

ROGERS: What form did the discrimination take in Europe  
when you were there?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, at first there was none, and I had very



great acceptance by all of the artists and by the men sculptors. But finally, when I began to be more and more shown. . . . [tape recorder turned off] I had this contract; I was establishing myself as an independent artist to the extent where no longer was there any kind of paternalism. You see, at first the men were so friendly to me because it was kind of a paternalistic attitude. But when I was standing on my own two feet and there in competition with them, then they became very, very aggressively against me. I was never invited to the Salon de Mai except the one time which I told you about. Did I tell you about that?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: The reason I was invited was because I was American and had been working in Paris. I had a gallery, I had some stature, and so the cultural attaché said to the Salon de Mai, "Look, here's an American artist you haven't invited every time there's been a salon. Why don't you invite her?" So they did. And I did a big Point. This is when I started my Point Series, and I did a big one, four feet across. I delivered it to the salon, and when I came in, one of the leading artists said, "She shouldn't put it in the gallery; we'll put it out on the terrace, out on the walkway coming into the gallery." Well, another artist said, "Oh, no, no"--it was César [Baldichini] (I don't know whether you know César)--said,





"No, no, Claire really should be in the gallery." I had brought my own base, and they said, "Well, we won't put it on the base, anyway. We'll put it on the floor." So they put me on the floor, and I accepted and took my base home with me. Well, who should come to the show, and it was [Daniel] Cordier, one of the biggest collectors in Europe, and he bought my piece. [##]

ROGERS: Do you think their attitude has changed?

FALKENSTEIN: No, they'd do the same thing again. And it's very interesting. They're very chauvinistic, not only against Americans but also against women. And it's because of insecurity. I mean, it's hard to earn a living, and here's another whole group of competitors coming in-- Americans. And yet they'll jump at the chance to go to America and exhibit all over the place and get commissions here or anything. But they don't transfer that feeling.

ROGERS: Then I would assume that there aren't too many women exhibiting in that same circle.

FALKENSTEIN: They have two or three, but they weren't very powerful, and they played the game with the men pretty well. They let them be paternalistic. [laughter]

ROGERS: Did you resist these attitudes?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure. I mean, I was out there just doing my work, but doing it without any compromising and expressing what I felt I had to.

ROGERS: Didn't you find that you were torn between



accepting this patronizing and losing friends and being all alone?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no. That's the reason that I finally was pretty much alone, because I didn't compromise. And I would never compromise, because my life is based on the truth as I see it. I mean, I wouldn't compromise one minute. That's another reason that my commissions, my big public works, have never been compromising. I've never compromised in them. And each one of them is a step ahead for me in technique and concept and workmanship. I've never repeated exactly, and I was always a step ahead. I don't know whether you've looked at them. Even though they're large and the grand scale that I like to . . .



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NOVEMBER 7, 1976

ROGERS: In our last conversation, you were discussing your experiences with discrimination in Europe and the show in particular that was given in Paris, where you were not really allowed to have your pieces displayed in the same context as the men who were there. Do you think the discrimination was because you were an American, because you were becoming successful, or because you were a woman?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the problem was, I think, not all general; I think part of it was personal. For instance, the one sculptor who was the most against me I think had a degree of jealousy over my work, because I was going into areas which were new and away from traditional methods and traditional attitudes. Also it was kind of a blackmail, too, because I was an American and a woman, and the chauvinism was evident as well. It's very curious, because when I first went to Paris some of these people were very friendly. But as soon as I had a gallery and a contract, and I was being shown in Italy and all over, the attitude changed. At first there was a lot of friendship offered me. So I guess on the whole it had to do with--well, I was out there just like the next one in competition, I think, for the most part, probably.

ROGERS: Did this continue? Did it get worse?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, this was toward the end of my stay in Europe. So I don't know what would have happened if I'd stayed on. But there are very few of those male sculptors that I have any kind of real friendship with. The only one who was totally free of all that and really friendly was Giacometti. Of course, he was a generation ahead, and these others were younger. He had really made it, and there was no problem of anybody--I don't think he competed with anybody. He just was himself. I don't know what was in his mind.

ROGERS: Who were some of the other people that were working. . . ? [##] Did you find the same kind of reaction among the other Americans in Paris that you had originally been befriended by?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, frankly, most of the Americans that I knew that were really friendly were Americans from San Francisco, and most of them had gone back home. Some of the ones that stayed, again, I didn't have very much contact with by the time I left Paris. It's very hard in an artist's community to have friendships. Everybody's in competition.

ROGERS: Is this true even if you're not working in the same medium?

FALKENSTEIN: It's true. It's very hard to have friendships with artists, that's all.

ROGERS: You're thinking from a personal point of view?





Or do you find that other artists have said the same thing?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I think it's a general--everybody knows it. I mean, it's just a general attitude. Everybody knows it's that way.

ROGERS: Well, where does an artist draw these friendships from, then?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, just like anybody else. For instance, I don't know many dealers who have very many great friends among the dealers. I don't know any--frankly, I don't know of people who are in the same profession who have great friends in the same profession. And it's not just artists. Do you?

ROGERS: Well, doctors have a tendency to stay together, and lawyers.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't think so, I don't think so. They may have a superficial kind of relationship, but I don't think it's a real friendship, as it might be with another group.

ROGERS: Well, when an art historian reads the accountings of various schools that have sprung up--for instance, the New York School--there seems to be a great deal of camaraderie among those men going back and forth to the studios and visiting socially with each other. Very, very close.

FALKENSTEIN: No. Not so. There is a superficial camaraderie. And once in a while two artists will feed upon each other, just as [Ellsworth] Kelly and--oh, you know--



Morris Louis did. I mean, they were very close, and they fed upon one another. But it's rare. I think there are groups. I mean, I think there are some groups which--how do you say?--I like to think in terms of feeding upon one another. They give to each other and receive from each other, and that's a group. And that's different than the kind of thing I'm talking about--friendship, just a free friendship.

ROGERS: Well, what kind of a social milieu did you have then in your latter years in Paris?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had friendships with critics in general, some people in UNESCO, just the way I have friendships here with just a cross section of people, but not too many artist friends.

ROGERS: What was UNESCO doing in Paris then?

FALKENSTEIN: That's the center.

ROGERS: I mean, how were they active, and how did you get involved with them?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had a letter of introduction. You remember, I was on that first council that met in San Francisco. Do you remember? I knew Dr. Morley very well and she represented--she was the director of the museum; now she's director of ICOM for Asia, the International Committee on Museums. She's now there in India and is director of that. So when I went to Paris, I had letters of introduction to several people in UNESCO from her because



at that time she was director of the San Francisco museum. So I kept those friendships in UNESCO and made more. Then I knew the people in the government, the cultural division of United States government. For instance, Darthea Speyer was the acting cultural attaché, and she became a very good friend. I mean, you go to a strange country, and how do you make friends except with your work and with the activities that you have? It's not as though you were born there and grew up there and had childhood friends. You don't. But it's going to a very strange place where you don't even know the language. And as it was, I was very poor also. I had no money, practically, and yet I made all kinds of friends and managed to survive in a situation that was pretty hostile.

ROGERS: Your work with the cultural attaché and the UNESCO people, did that involve any kind of volunteer work on your time?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no, no.

ROGERS: It was strictly social?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I was an artist. I wasn't volunteering anything.

ROGERS: Well, I just wondered what form of activity . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Okay, look, I'm an American artist working in Paris. UNESCO is an international cultural organization. They're interested in culture. They're interested in artists. Therefore, I was being observed as an American





working in Paris. As far as the cultural attaché was concerned, I was an American working in Paris. They had exhibitions that traveled throughout France, traveled throughout Europe. They had exhibitions at the embassy of the Americans; I mean, the American section would give exhibitions. Now, the other sections would, too; some other country might do it, too. I don't know; I never paid much attention. But I was in several exhibitions throughout the years there through the fact that I was an American working in Paris. That's how it came about.

ROGERS: I see. At this point in time, when we were discussing your work, we talked about the gate, which was really the first time that they used your sign as an element in the design. I would like to discuss with you this element that has stayed with you for such a long period of time and the new element that you had with Leda and the swan, where you were using wire to enclose space. Giacometti made a comment about your work . . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Giacometti? You mean [Umberto] Morucchio?

ROGERS: Well, I'm not talking about his word about yours, but I'm talking about the type of work where you are enclosing space rather than filling it with solid mass. He said about his work when he constructed: "Once the object is constructed, I tend to see in it, transformed and displaced, facts which have profoundly moved me, often without my realizing it." I wondered if you had the same



kind of an experience.

FALKENSTEIN: No, he's talking from another point of view entirely. He's talking from a mystical, almost transcendental attitude, and I'm talking mostly with the idea of structure in relation to my attitude towards space, which is not this moving into the spiritual and transcendental. I'm really thinking in terms of--it's more scientific. I am much more scientific in my attitude than Giacometti, an entirely different attitude. So when I'm talking about expanding space, I'm thinking in terms actually Einsteinian, the Einsteinian attitude of the expanding universe. I'm thinking about total space, that you do not make something to displace space but whatever you do is part of space. It's a through thing. It's not something that pushes space away from it, but space goes through it.

ROGERS: There's no displacement at all?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no displacement. Well, that's ideal, when I say that. That's ideal. For instance, that piece there which is an expanding open structure using the never-ending screen in a kind of--how would you say?--textural structure; it doesn't try to push space away from it but enters into space, in a way, so that from the interior to the exterior and beyond, you have a continuity.

ROGERS: When you talk about interior . . .

FALKENSTEIN: All right, I'm talking about the interior that you see there, and the interior would be simply open



space. That's all it is.

ROGERS: There's no nucleus in there, no perception of a nucleus at all?

FALKENSTEIN: No nucleus. No, not at all.

ROGERS: In the never-ending screen. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: And that's the idea of the never-ending screen. There is no nucleus. It's a continuum of interval, and that could extend on forever.

ROGERS: But where does it start?

FALKENSTEIN: It starts with my three open triangles, there.

ROGERS: If a viewer walks around this, he has a feeling of it enclosing space, though.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't think so. He'll even have a hard time making a shape out of that.

ROGERS: So you don't think that you're doing space drawing by having a peripheral edge?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I don't.

ROGERS: And that if I were to draw a line around the edge . . .

FALKENSTEIN: You'd have a very hard time doing that.

ROGERS: And the piece could conceivably go with the never-ending screen, it could go on and on then?

FALKENSTEIN: That's the idea.

ROGERS: It extends out into infinity.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, now watch the implication. Just as Giacometti talks about a spiritual kind of meaning, something that is in the human spirit which is revealing itself



to him through his work, I feel that the total sense of the universe can be revealed in a thing like this if one has within them the possibility of entering into it. It's the same way with his work, too. I mean, a man from Borneo couldn't enter into it. [tape recorder turned off] I just would like to repeat that there has to be some kind of introduction, a cultural introduction into a work. I think that there are universal qualities in all great art, no matter where it is. I mean, it can be from Borneo and it can be from here, but we'll read into it what we have within us. Maybe that's what makes a work universal, that it has enough ambiguity so that the person from different cultures can interpret, in their own way, a content. So in working with transparency and structure in transparency, you have another attitude from solid volume; rather than displacing or replacing space by an object, you have no displacement but simply--now, this is ideal, and this is in the thought content of the work--what you have is continuum of space, so the object is like an integer of space, and through the object you have more of a sense of the continuum of space than you would have otherwise. It has a necessity--I mean, I feel this, in the kind of structural sculpture that I'm doing--it has a necessity of the implication that we human beings are part of space, that we as mobile parts of the universe have multiple points of view, we're in motion, everything is in change and flux, and whatever in our





environment has real meaning has to be in sympathy and harmony with all mobility. And mobility doesn't mean just kinetic mobility but the possibility of entering into changed points of view, looking at something from different points of view and having the sense of the total work. You know what I mean? A totality in motion. And that's the reason that I like to work in this idea of structure and in transparency.

ROGERS: Do you think that one side gives you something different than the other side?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, it's in constant flux and change; and yet you get the sense of the other side, and of all sides, even looking at it just from one side, because you're looking right through it.

ROGERS: Have you ever had an opportunity to get an Eastern reaction to your work, as against a Western world reaction?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, in India and that sort of thing--you're talking about that?

ROGERS: Yes, or even a non-Western, a traditional . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Or Japanese? Well, I have a feeling about most of these people. In India they're in a conventional and in a traditional grasp; they have, though, in their old attitude, something of this, but it hasn't come into the twentieth century. That's the reason the Japanese have been so influenced by the American art. I don't know whether you know that, but they have. They've just picked up the abstract expressionists and done them one better. They pick up



anything that we do and do it one better.

\* \* \*

[This portion of the text has been sealed  
at the request of the interviewee.]

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ROGERS: It's difficult for me to adapt what you have just said about the never-ending screen to a piece like the Sun Series, which is just, to me, a definite enclosure of space.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the Sun Series encloses space but it doesn't enclose space. It establishes a kind of a membrane, but the membrane is made up of intervals of wire junctions which are all opening. And it has nothing to do with enclosing space in a sense that you've lost it in the interior, but you're aware of that interior; whereas if you do a volume thing, you're thinking of it as solid volume and you don't think of it as space. I'm contrasting this to casting. I don't know whether you know my work well enough, but even in the Sun Series there's no complete membrane: it's always open. I mean, there's a section that's closed and a section that's open so that there's the flow through and around on both sides. It's not as though you're just working with one side closing in space.



ROGERS: How does water fit in with this?

FALKENSTEIN: Water entered through the fountains and became part of the continuum of the curves which, you know--the unit was the U, the Sign of the U, and so the U became a continuous curving thing through the water, because the water would continue out and continue the line that the tubes made, 'cause the water was coming through the tubes.

ROGERS: When was the first time you introduced water into your pieces, other than the . . .

FALKENSTEIN: In '65. In '64, really, 'cause the first one I did was for the Esther Robles Gallery, and that was when I experimented on the idea. However, I had the concept about three years before, in '55--that would be ten years before. When I first came back from Europe, I had the possibility of coming here, down to Los Angeles.

Garrett Eckbo--no, it couldn't have been that long ago; it must have been around 1960 when Garrett got me going. Yes, it must have been about five years before I finally did it. Garrett Eckbo wanted me to present an idea for Ambassador College, 'cause he was the landscape architect, and there was this possibility of a commission to do a pool, to do a fountain for Ambassador College (I don't know whether you know it; it's over in Pasadena). So that's when I had this idea of continuing my sculpture with the tubing acting as the water-carriers, and the





tubing acting also as the structure, so you had this integration of water with structure. And that was right in with my philosophy. Here, it's air with structure. There, it was water with structure. So there was no dispersion, and there was no separation between the elements. It was all a thing with unity. So they didn't like my idea. But I have the drawings. And then I went back to Europe, you see. That was in 1960, I guess. And '61 was when Esther Robles came to Europe and invited me to come here and have a show and do a fountain for them. So I already had this concept, and I hadn't had a chance to work it out; so that was the chance I had there, and I worked it out. [Structure and Flow, No. 1.]

ROGERS: Did you tell her about it ahead of time?

FALKENSTEIN: I told her about it, and this is the funniest thing you ever heard: one of the reasons--I hate to talk about it, but I might as well, 'cause it's so funny. When I told her about it, she agreed completely, so she absolutely knew what I was talking about. [##]

ROGERS: Let's talk a little bit about the actual process of putting water in the fountain, the technicalities of it, how it worked out, and whether it surprised you. You decided to put water through the tubes, so you had to have a source of water and a continuum and an outlet. How did you decide where your outlets were going to be?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that was the idea. The outlets were



part of the structure. I knew exactly where I wanted the outlets. My only problem, especially when I did the thing for them--because I had no engineer; it was just myself working it out--was to get that circulation through the fountain so that I would get water in every part that I wanted it. And I managed to. It's a good fountain; they've got a very good fountain. And that was just sheer experiment, trial and error. But then when I did the big one [Structure and Flow, No. 2] for Wilshire, I had an engineer to get the water up fourteen feet, you know. I needed a certain amount of pressure and gauges and so on for that. I needed an engineer.

ROGERS: When you first turned the water on, did you know ahead of time in your mind what it was going to look like when the water came out? That's a very important element.

FALKENSTEIN: Sure, yes. Well, I'll tell you what happened. See, it wasn't just to have it come out like that, like a hose, so I had to experiment with baffling the openings. It came out of the tube, but then I had to decide how I wanted it to go. So I would baffle by the other tube coming up and breaking the flow, or closing down the opening, or turning it around a little to get some kind of splash on some other element that was out here. So it was a constant kind of creative exploration to get just the kind of shape that I wanted as it came out of the tube. You had to shape the water when it came out of the tube.



I never know whether you understand me--you just look at me. [laughter]

ROGERS: I understand what you're saying. I'm interested in the idea of using water as an element of design. This is what you were doing, wasn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, you see, the conventional attitude about a fountain, and especially sculptural fountains, is that you do a piece of sculpture, and you put water and have it splash against it; or you have water coming out of these shapes, out of the mouth (I'm talking about some of these European fountains where the water will be coming out of the mouth), and all it does is spit it out, you see. It has nothing to do with the form. It has nothing to do with the volume of the sculpture in relation to the water. There are just two elements that are brought together, even in an antagonistic way. So I didn't want to do that. I wanted to unite it. I wanted everything to be of a piece, no kind of hostility between the two elements. So that was the idea.

ROGERS: But there is a lot of--what should I say?--there's a lot of splashing up against each other in your pieces that form something new and different that you don't have any control over, in a way, except by the force of the water.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, when I was doing it, I knew what I wanted, and if it seems to go against one another,



they really don't. They flow into one another. If they seem to clash, one will [actually] be above, and one will be below, so they overlap. They don't just go wham, like that. No part of my fountain does that.

ROGERS: Is your fountain still whole when the water's not on?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't think the one down in Wilshire is; I think that it really needs the water. Well, I don't think any of them are. They all need the participation of the water. And that's the reason that I suffer, you know. Because one is like, you know, it's like half-there, suffering. I give up. I mean I've tried, and people write letters, but they just don't do it. They just won't put it on.

ROGERS: What are you referring to now?

FALKENSTEIN: I'm talking about the Wilshire fountain, down on Wilshire and Hauser, the big one down there.

ROGERS: What was the name of that bank?

FALKENSTEIN: California Federal Savings and Loan. So anyway. . . .

ROGERS: Was there some controversy over that fountain?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh! Weren't you here then?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: My God, it was the worst thing you can imagine. Well, there was a fantastic opposition by the bankers. You see, I was chosen to do the fountain by Ric Brown, who was





the director of the museum, who was the director of the museum at the time. I had just come to Los Angeles, had had a show, this first show at the Esther Robles Gallery. It was the last day of the show, the last minute at six o'clock. He hadn't come to the show; Esther had called him, written and everything, but he didn't pay attention because she didn't have that much clout with the museum. I called, and I wanted him to come see my show. Now, this is just to get people in there, especially someone who's as important as a museum director. And who should come to town but Martha Jackson? So she sent a telegram to Ric Brown. We were interested in getting Ric Brown to the show. So she sent a telegram there, and so he came at the last minute, six o'clock, on the last day. Well, he was overwhelmed with the work and said, "Claire's the one to do the fountain." For one year he had been looking around for someone to do that fountain, and he hadn't found anybody he liked in Los Angeles. It had to be somebody in the area of Los Angeles. So he says, "Claire's the one to do it."

Well, so I did it. I did a model which was accepted by the committee at the bank. I worked with the vice-president, Wally Obers, the whole time. He saw it grow and develop. Everybody knew what I was doing. The architect came several times. But as soon as it was



finished and put on the corner, it was like all hell went loose; all hell was let loose. Ralph Story stood out there and interviewed people as they walked by and nobody liked . . . One little boy, about twelve years old, said, "Well, this is impossible. We shouldn't have things like this on the street. This should go in the museum." And somebody else said, "What is it? Is it an airplane wreck?" Somebody else said . . . And anyway, this would come over the air, and then there would be all these articles in the newspapers and letters against it. [##] And here I was. So I called Ric, 'cause he was in another job by then. A year had gone by; he was working in Houston. So I called him, and I said, "I'm having a terrible time here. I don't know what's going to happen. I think they're going to take it out." And he said, "Well, get ahold of Freddy Weisman. Have him help you out." So I called Freddy Weisman. He's a collector here, an important collector; he's the brother-in-law of Norton Simon. So he started working on it. He went to the bank. Then another person, who is a friend of mine and who's a public relations man who would work with Martha Jackson, got up a brochure, because I was getting publicity all over the world.

ROGERS: Who was that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, his name was David Parry. So he made a brochure and took it to the bankers and showed them that



people all over the world, in England and I don't know where all, had gotten wind of this and were giving it good publicity. It got good publicity everywhere else. So just then Fred was hit on the back of his head by a thug. [##]

ROGERS: Wasn't it in a nightclub?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, something. Do you remember that?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: So he was very active for me for the moment, but then he was out. Well, Katharine Kuh had written an article--this is one of the damning things--she had written an article in Saturday Review and had damned the museum, saying, you know, it's awful architecture and this and that and this and that. "But the one thing in Los Angeles that really is good is this fountain on Wilshire Boulevard." And she wrote about it as though it was, you know, one of the greatest works of art ever in America. [##] So they really wanted to get rid of it. But then there were several places that wanted it, like Carbondale, Illinois; by the time Fred had worked a little while, there was a lot of places that wanted it. Then they decided, well, they had something; they better not just give it away. And then also, it had to do with the money it would take to move it. And already it had caused such a sensation, they didn't want any more publicity, I guess. [laughter]

ROGERS: Did you get paid for your part in it?





FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure; I mean, there wasn't any question of money. Oh, yes, I was paid well. Everything was fine, and my God, when it went up, I was so happy and the thing was going beautifully. They had it on for about three years, and then they just stopped it and they never have had it on again. And it's because of the maintenance situation. [##] And there it sits on Wilshire Boulevard, this great big mass of copper tubing. And when it's on, it's just simply glorious.

ROGERS: And it hasn't been on in three years?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, it's been longer than that since it's been on. I don't know how long; I've lost track. I think it's been about five or six years that it hasn't been on. But anyway, that's the sad story of that.

ROGERS: That might not be the end of the tale, though.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think--see, under the street, three floors down, they've got a situation there, a room that's twice as big as this with all the equipment--filters, gauges, everything you can think of to do the most marvelous kind of thing. It just sits there not being used. So I mean, everything is perfect; all they've got to do is turn it on. But the bankers who are there are unsympathetic; they went through all of that publicity, and you know . . .

ROGERS: Well, perhaps when that regime is retired out, a younger group of bankers won't. . . . [##] What did you mean when you said there's a lot of maintenance?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, they have to clean it out, and they have to--that's all: clean it out about once a month, and so on, you know. But they said, "Oh, the kids put detergent in it and . . ."

ROGERS: But that's no different than the common problems with any public building that has a fountain in the front. They have to clean it and . . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I know, but they just didn't have that energy or willingness to put themselves out for it. I think that one of the interesting things, when they were about ready to take it out, was the fact that--well, Lord Snowden and Princess Margaret were here. This is when the Music Center was just finished, and they were invited for a brunch there at the Music Center. They had to go down Wilshire because they were staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel. They passed this fountain, and they were so surprised they stopped the car and looked and insisted on seeing it. [##]

ROGERS: I want to talk about Richard Brown later when you are talking about Los Angeles.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know too much about him. I don't know anything about him, except--all I know was that brief moment when I was working with him in relation to this, and he was just terrific. But I don't know anything else about him. It's just a shame that he left. I don't know what the whole score was. [##]

ROGERS: What do you think of it [art museum] as a building?



FALKENSTEIN: I think it's awful.

ROGERS: Why?

FALKENSTEIN: I think it's lousy. I'm not afraid to say that. What do you think of it? Do you like it?

ROGERS: I have never seen a new, young, large museum before. I was disappointed in the collection. I didn't pay too much [attention] to the building, but it seems like the building overshadows the works that are there.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't think so. I think they've got some pretty good works, but I think the building itself is lousy.

ROGERS: I don't mean it overshadows it in quality; I mean that it's not conducive to . . .

FALKENSTEIN: They've got some wonderful works, marvelous.

ROGERS: Well, let me rephrase that. I'm more aware of being in a building with lots of openings and spaces than I am being where I can enjoy the work that's there.



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ROGERS: Did you have anything further you wanted to say about the museum, as a building?

FALKENSTEIN: No. I think it's improved now that they have that water out of there and they have a chance for a sculpture garden. 'Cause the water--evidently, they were never able to seal it so it wouldn't leak down into the building. Then the water became polluted; I mean, they didn't maintain it. There again they didn't maintain it. So now that it's a grassy area and they have sculpture there, there's some use for it; so it's improved.

ROGERS: There must be some structural problems being on top of the tar pit--sinking problems.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, they probably had to float it in some way; I don't know. I really don't know what the problems were.

ROGERS: When you took your first tour from the San Francisco Museum of Art to Europe, you told us that it was very successful. Now, you had another opportunity later on to do it again. You met the group in Milan. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Let's see, no. Did I? Yes, I guess I did. How'd you know that? [laughter] Did I tell you?

ROGERS: I read it.

FALKENSTEIN: 'Cause I'd forgotten where I'd met them,





but that's true, I met them in Milan. See, one year, which was '59, I did all of France for the San Francisco Museum. And it was so good and everybody was so happy about it that they said, "Well, now do Italy." So the following year, 1960, I did all of Italy.

ROGERS: With the same group of people?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no. There were two, I think, that came back, the [Robert] Buffums came back. And it was at that time that I got my commission to do the Buffum fountain [Suspended Fountain]; that was after that tour. And when we went to Venice, I was able to take the group to Peggy Guggenheim's, the foundation of Peggy Guggenheim. And that was when I got the job to do the gates for her. It came through that whole sequence there.

ROGERS: Could you elaborate a little bit on that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, see, what we did--we did the same thing as in France. We had a bus, and I had a courier and everything was taken care of. All I had to do was be the artistic counselor and also try to keep people happy in the sense that at least they could come to me if they had a problem or something personal that they'd like to talk over or something. They just needed a leader, and I was a leader. But that was all. Actually, it was just a marvelous opportunity for me, because in traveling this way so concentratedly and going through Italy on this bus--oh, it was just marvelous. Well, by the time we got to Venice,



I said--see, the fact that I had lived in Italy and worked in Italy . . . I hadn't worked in Venice yet, but I had been there a lot. I didn't do anything in Venice really until--I'd worked in Rome but I hadn't worked in Venice. But anyway I had contacts in Venice; I had contacts in Rome and in Milan and in Torino. So what we did was to plan the day, plan the times so that we could meet the artists that I knew and go to the museums and see the town and so on. So we got to Venice. We had to first go to the Piazza San Marco and the church. One of the most important things was to go to the Guggenheim Foundation, because she has the greatest collection, Peggy, of Dada and surrealism, probably in the world. So I got Morucchio, who is a great Italian critic, probably the most important Italian critic, to speak to the group at the Guggenheim Foundation. And she was overjoyed, because she is really anxious to project the collection and have people come. She has regular hours when people come, and there are catalogs and so on. Well, everybody was very pleased, and we went inside in her house, 'cause the foundation is not just one--it's her house and it's another area, two buildings really. So everybody was very pleased, and as we were going and saying goodbye, she followed us out to her gates. These gates were big wooden heavy gates with little iron insets where you could look through to see who was on the other side. But they were cast iron, very heavy. So when she opened the gate to



let us out, she said, "Now, be careful, because the other day one of these cast iron pieces fell out and almost hit somebody. If it would hit you, it'd kill you." Then she turned to me and said, "Claire, I need a new gate. What about you making me a gate?" And I said, "Sure, I'll do it." See, I was the only one she knew, the only artist she knew, who had done a gate. I had done the Pignatelli gate three years before in '57. So this is '60.

ROGERS: And she was aware of that?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes. Everybody in Europe, I mean in Italy, knew I did those gates. They were highly publicized. So I had it in my mind, "I'm going to do those gates." So when I got back to America, I wrote her and said, "I'm going to be in New York at a certain time, and if you're ever going to be in New York, then we can talk about it." ('Cause I was dividing my time then between a New York studio and a Paris studio.) So she came to visit me in New York. [##] So While she was there, she came down to my studio and we talked it over. We came to an agreement that I would go back to Italy--see, that was 1960--I would go to Italy the following year and do them. And we made a little contract between us.

So when I got back to France in '61 ('cause I think this was in the winter of '60, and I got back in the spring of '61), I called her from Paris. And she says, "Well, Claire, you know, I'm not so sure that I want to





go ahead with it now. I think we'll wait a while." In the meantime I had a date with--did I go through this with you before? No? Well, I had a date with a gallery to give a show in '61, Galleria Il Canale. So I said to her, "I'm coming to Venice anyhow, because I have a show, and so we can talk it over then." And I just let it lie. She was getting cold feet. Well, so then I went to Venice, and we had a drink together and went up on her roof. She has a roof that looks out over the Grand Canal. And I said to her right off the bat, I said to her, "Peggy, you're scared." She says, "Yes, I am." I said, "Well, I'm having this show. Why don't I make a model, and I'll say, 'The proposed gate for Peggy Guggenheim'? It won't be as though you're committed in any way, but we'll say 'proposed.'" She says, "Well, all right, if that won't hold me to anything. I don't mind if you do that." So I did the show, and instead of doing one model, I did two models. One was very closely related to the Pignatelli gates. And then here was an entirely new idea of using the never-ending screen three-dimensionally in a very tailor-made way for this other model.

Well, so the day of the opening of my show, she came in a sari. She came with Perry Rathbone, who was then the director of the Boston museum. They got off from the Grand Canal ('cause this gallery faced the Grand Canal), came in a gondola, and came in. It was real class to have her



come in with the director from the Boston museum. Well, he is a very nice person and a very open and friendly man. So he came in and here were both the models. He came in, "Oh, Claire, they're marvelous, they're marvelous!" And he came over and said, "But we won't use that one. We'll use this one." Well, the one that I did with the never-ending screen which was very tailor-made, I didn't put any glass in it. But the one like Pignatelli I put glass in it. So he quietly pulled the glass out of the one and says, "But you've got to have glass in it." So he pulled out these chunks of glass from one and put it into the other. And I said, "Well, I don't care. I think it would be kind of nice myself, but I just wanted the variety of one with and one without." Well, Peggy didn't say anything. She just listened. So I went back to my pensione over on the Giudecca, and about three days went by. Then she came over, and I had a studio there where I was working. I had the whole bottom floor, and there was a window that opened out onto the garden. I was working there by the window, and I sort of felt this gaze on the back of my neck. I turned around, and there was Peggy, watching me. And she says, "Well, haven't you started?" I said, "Well, okay."

So I then and there went and bought all my material and brought it over and started working. I was moving along quite nicely, and then Herbert Read came to town. [##]



He said to her, "Claire can't make a gate that will be strong enough to protect that great collection of yours." She reacts to all these things, see, and so she called me up. I was only about halfway through the first gate. See, it was twelve feet high and four feet wide, each gate. The whole thing is eight feet across and twelve feet high.

ROGERS: Security was really a big problem with the gate, wasn't it? I mean, it had to be secure.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, so I was halfway through, and she called me over there and says, "Claire, I've decided that you'll finish this one gate, and I'll use it in my museum, but we won't go ahead with the gates for the portal." I said, "No, we've got to do these gates for the portal. It has to be the garden gate." And she says, "Well, they're mine. I can do anything I want with them if I buy them."

[laughter] So I said okay, and I just went home and continued to work on this. She said, "Okay, finish this one, and we'll see what we'll do after that."

So the day arrived when I finished it.

ROGERS: You just did one?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I had to do one after another. So the day arrived when I finished one, the first, which took about, oh my gosh, two and a half months, working all the time. No one--just doing it all myself, you know, welding, welding, welding. Well, I don't know how it happened, but everybody in town knew, in Venice, that I'd finished the





one gate. I remember Morris Graves was there, and quite a few artists from Paris were there. How they knew about it, I don't know. But everybody knew about it. So I got the cook in the pensione to set out a table for tea and cookies. And I put this one gate--see, where I had my studio went out into the garden, and here was this sort of opening, this arch, into the garden. And I put the gate so it was leaning against one side and you looked right through it into the sunshine in the garden. When you got off the whatever, if you're on the vaparetto or your gondola or whatever, you'd have to get up on the pavement, then walk through this tunnel, and then you looked out onto this garden. Well, she arrived with her daughter, Pegeen. Pegeen was a little bit like Perry in that she was just a very happy, normal, nice girl who had no hangups about anything. She came in and she saw it and said, "Oh, Claire, it's marvelous!" She came over and hugged me and kissed me. And here was Peggy standing back, looking--and said nothing. Everybody was there talking, and Peggy was listening to everything. Well, one of the things that Herbert Read said was that people can put their hands through and they can just go over to the lock and undo it, you know. Well, finally, the way it ended up, the thing is about that thick in the thinnest part.

ROGERS: You're saying about four . . .

FALKENSTEIN: About four inches, and about nine or ten





inches in the widest part, where I went over the glass and it undulates. So by the time you go in through a three-dimensional structure like that, you cannot get through. I mean, the interstice becomes, you know, a real small opening. So there was nothing to do with security. I mean, it was absolutely--and it wasn't that heavy. It wasn't as heavy as her big wooden gates, and yet it was all iron and a real iron structure. And that's what she couldn't get over, that it wasn't as heavy as her big one. Anyway, all these people are talking, talking, talking about it, and looking at it, you know, and very favorably. So then I didn't do anything. You see, I finished it. She hadn't said anything to me; she just left.

ROGERS: She came and looked at it and left and never said one word?

FALKENSTEIN: And didn't say one word, not one word. So there I was. And I was sitting again, working in my studio, and there she was again after about three days. And she says, "Well, aren't you working on the second gate?" So I said, "Okay," and so then I began working on the second gate.

Well, finally the time came when it was almost finished, the second gate. The first one was finished. And she came over to me and says, "Claire, now, even though I agreed that we have these gates, I don't know that the Belle Arti will accept them." You see, the Belle Arti is a committee in



Venice and they have to accept everything. You put a nail in the wall, and if it's outdoors, they have to agree, because they're keeping it as an historical monument--Venice is an historical monument. It has to be all integrated, the whole town. Well, I agree: I mean, I think it's terrific they're doing this. Anyway, I said, "Listen, Peggy, just let me finish it. Let's just finish it." Well, the time came when I was about ready to finish, and she went off to Rome. So I put the gates up and got some champagne.

ROGERS: You installed them?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure.

ROGERS: You took the old ones down and put the . . . Didn't you have to have some kind of approval from her to do that first?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes. She said, "Go ahead and do it and we'll see what happens." But she didn't wait around to see what would happen. She went off to Rome.

ROGERS: Oh, I see. But she did leave clearance for you to go ahead and remove the other ones with the people. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes. It had to be done simultaneously. So we did it. I had two helpers.

ROGERS: Did you have to fashion new hinges?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure, everything.

ROGERS: Into the walls? Was there some construction in the jambs of the gate, you know, the walls?



FALKENSTEIN: Yes, they're still there. I noticed this last time when I was there this year. I was there this year, and I said, "Peggy, why don't you take out those old hinges there?" They were from the old days. They'd been up there all these years--'61 to '76--fifteen years. I said, "Why don't you do that?" And she said, "Well, I never thought of it. They aren't very pretty, are they? I guess I'll take those out."

ROGERS: You were able to install the new hinges then without the old ones getting in the way?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, there's no connection. So anyway, well, you see, I didn't want to take that responsibility of removing anything except the gates, because again it was the Belle Arti who had to say. The Belle Arti were composed of about four people, critics and knowledgeable art professors. Anyway, there were four of them, and I think they're reelected every so often (I don't know how often). Anyway, so I got my cook again to bring over a table and to serve, but this time instead of having tea, we had champagne and cookies. The Belle Arti would come and then I had a great friend who was then the American consul, and so I had the American consul there also serving. And I didn't invite anybody else, just the Belle Arti, the consul, and who else? I don't remember whether I invited Morucchio. Anyway, it was just a very tight little group. Well, here they were, up, working, and they came over.





(And Peggy was in Rome. She didn't know what was happening.) They came and they said, "Oh, they're beautiful." [laughter] They said, "They're not like Venice but they're like nature." So everybody had a very good time, drank a lot of champagne. So then I waited to gather all my forces and get everything organized, 'cause she had paid me before she left. Everything was all settled.

So I got myself together and went off to Paris, not having heard from her or anything. Well, I was home--I must tell you: this is another thing with Etienne Martin. I was at an opera, and he was there. We met. And he said, "Oh, you're back. Did she like the gate?" Not anything, not "How do you do?" "Go to hell," anything. He said, "Did she like them?" And I thought to myself, "I better not tell him that she hasn't even seen them." So I said, "Yes." With that we passed on. 'Cause this was my same old enemy there, you know.

So about a week later from that evening--I guess I was back about two weeks--I got this letter from Peggy. And she says, "Claire, I walked up the street. I didn't know what I'd find. I didn't know whether they'd be up or not; I didn't know whether they'd been accepted. And there they were. I pressed the button" ('cause they were all electrically controlled) "and they opened. Everything worked so beautifully, and I love them." And I said to myself, "Ohhhhh." But what a thing to go through! But I just want to show you something.



ROGERS: Do you think that people like things because other people tell them that they're good, or do they like them and hold out against any kind of criticism on a piece that is privately owned?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I think these gates have gone through the most devastating kind of personal criticism from different points of view, and I don't think there's anyone who listens to anybody, especially in Europe. There isn't any kind of following the leader there; I mean, they're all pretty independent. And I'm just going to read you something that Peggy wrote. Now, this was a thing she wrote. Here they are. She's used the gates on her catalog. This is the catalog of her collection, and this is the last catalog she did.

ROGERS: What year was that published?

FALKENSTEIN: In '66. All right. She said--now, this is a little thing she wrote in the catalog: "Claire entered the gates of paradise. She was met by Saint Peter, who said, 'What are you doing here uninvited? No one can pass these gates without my permission.' 'But,' replied Claire, 'I made these gates myself with my own hands.' 'In that case,' replied Saint Peter, 'you are welcome, my child.'" And then she said, "With much love and more and more appreciation, Peggy. Venice, '66."

ROGERS: That's very nice.

FALKENSTEIN: But to have gone through all of that and



then to come out with this!

ROGERS: That's very gratifying for you, too.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but you can see here the density of the interstices. See, there's no possibility of anybody moving their hands in, especially when there's that much depth.

ROGERS: You say these open and are controlled electrically. Who opens and closes them?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there's a button. There's a button, and it is controlled in the kitchen--the maid. And then there's another control down near the gates, about fifty feet from the gates, so that there's no possibility of opening them without the connection in the kitchen or there, unless you have a key.

ROGERS: Did you have some help with that?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, sure, I had to have expert help. Whenever I needed help, I'd get it. That took an engineer and an electrician.

ROGERS: When you made the gates, you did the majority of the work in the studio, didn't you? And then you brought them to the site?

FALKENSTEIN: I brought them in a big--it was like a rowboat. We came over at five o'clock in the morning in this rowboat with these two gates. And we had to go around and around through the labyrinth of canals to finally come to a canal that was near to Peggy. Because you couldn't reach



the gates through the Grand Canal; I mean, you couldn't reach the gate site through the Grand Canal.

ROGERS: Once you got the gates up and installed, did you do any more to them, then?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, not for about five years or longer. About five years. Something happened to the biggest chunk of glass, this one. It was either vandalism or the change of climate from cold to warm and warm to cold--because it freezes in the winter there sometimes. It crumbled.

Peggy wrote me and said, "Claire, something's happened to this one piece of glass." I said, "Well, I'm going to come to Europe anyhow, and I'll come to Venice and work on it." So again I got up at five o'clock in the morning with two helpers. Now, this is typical. She says, "Claire, I want you to do it, and I want you to finish it, but I don't want to be any part of it, and I don't want to watch you working. I want it all finished by ten o'clock in the morning, and I don't want to see you working. I just want to come out and it'll be finished." So we got up at five o'clock in the morning; in the meantime I had to go over to the Murano and find a piece of glass that would be comparable to the other one. So I came with my bolt cutters, and I had to cut all of the connections around here and put the glass down in and make reconnections, new pieces to hold it in and weld it. 'Course we had to take the gate down, lay it on sawhorses, do it and then





put it back up again. And by ten o'clock, it was done. That's the only time. Of course, I've also been sending her brushes--which reminds me, I better send her some more--little wire brushes (they don't seem to find them in Italy), so they can clean it. You see, it's iron, so it has to have a base paint of lead oxide and then the lacquer, you know, regular black lacquer. I don't know why; we should have done it in copper, but no one uses copper outdoors there. I don't know why, but they just maintain it and so on.

ROGERS: Does it have to be repainted all the time?

FALKENSTEIN: About every two or three years.

ROGERS: Isn't it hard to paint that without getting it on the glass?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you have to cover the glass with tape. You know, just cover it.

ROGERS: Has there ever been any attempt to break into them?

FALKENSTEIN: No. It's impossible. That gate is a fortress. But it's very funny. I was there this year with my photographer from Paramount, remember, for our documentary, and he of course was dumbfounded by these gates. He couldn't believe it when he came upon them, these twelve-foot-high, big structures of these jewels, you know. And everybody feels the same. For instance, we were standing there with lots and lots of tourists



there at that time of year (see, we were there in August, the latter part of July or the early part of August). And everybody would come up and look at them. He couldn't believe it that all these people were so interested in these gates. I mean, it was a surprise to him to see such interest. See, he was doing photography, and he photographed a lot of these people watching, looking at the gates for the documentary. And we got Peggy, too; we got a beautiful documentary of her.

ROGERS: Have you had any inquiries to do other gates since then?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, yes. I did all the gates for St. Basil Church. That's--let's see, one, two, three, four, five, six--I did eight doors for St. Basil, but nothing comparable to this, because I mean these doors at St. Basil are not structures. They're just never-ending screens of 1/4 inch--no, they're more than 1/4 inch; they're 5/16 bronze. And then they are 1/8 x 1 inch strap corten steel. So I mean, that had to be done industrially. All I did was make full-scale drawings, and then they followed my drawing. But this is all done by my hands, completely. [laughter]

ROGERS: They're beautiful.

FALKENSTEIN: Absolutely completely. You have no idea until you actually see them.

ROGERS: Are they somewhere where people--you said an



awful lot of tourists come by. They must be exposed to the public then.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure, that goes into the foundation. That is the garden gate. The canal gates go into the house, but these go into the foundation where all of the work is.

ROGERS: Well, you said that you used bolt cutters to get at the glass. Is it conceivable that a real vandal could use bolt cutters?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, see, that's the difference between Italy and here. You don't have vandalism there really. America is something out of this world for vandalism. I mean, it's just unbelievable. But there there's no vandalism.

ROGERS: I was thinking if a thief really wanted to get into her place.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, a thief. Look, if they started--ha!--trying to cut a hole big enough to get in, it would take them all day and all night. They'd have to cut, cut, cut, cut. Not only cut, cut, cut, cut, but . . .

ROGERS: Well, I was thinking of cutting these along the edges here.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, even so, it would be difficult because it would be hard to get the bolt cutter into it. And it's so stiff: after you've got that cut, I don't think you could pull it out. I mean, it's just rigid.





ROGERS: Well, after you had this triumph that gave you a lot of publicity in Italy . . .

FALKENSTEIN: But it wasn't--it was kind of funny publicity. It was word-of-mouth. This gate was word-of-mouth, really. The other gate I had more magazine publicity (I mean, it was in Holiday and in a few magazines like that).

ROGERS: And what were your feelings now about staying in Europe? Were you entertaining thoughts before Esther Robles extended you the invitation to Southern California that you . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, you see, I had been here in 1960 and had done a commission. See, from that first tour, when those people from Long Beach were there, I had the invitation to come back--that was 1959--to come back in 1960 and do a door, a sculpture, Entrance Sculpture, an outside entrance piece for Dallas Conklin, who was one of the members of the tour. She was building a house, and she said, "Claire, I'd like to have you come and do that one." So I did. I came and I did it. And while I was here in 1960 doing it, she gave a party, and all these people came, and among them was Esther Robles. And that was really the first time I met Esther Robles. She invited Esther Robles because she thought it was the most important gallery. She invited a lot of people--Pasadena museum, and I don't know who all. So then I went back to Europe and did the gates for Peggy--well, did the tour in Italy (that was in



1960), and in '61 did the Guggenheim gate. So that was in '61, which was a year after I had been here to do these other things for Dallas Conklin. That was when the Robles came to Venice and saw me, and then they came to Paris. See, then I went back to Paris, and they went to Paris and saw me in Paris and made the invitation. But in the meantime, I was thinking about coming because . . . See, I had already stayed a year in San Francisco in '58, trying to stay on. But I couldn't support myself with my work and I didn't want to--I wanted to do that and I wanted to find a place where I could, and San Francisco was not the place. So I went back to Europe. That was '58, and in '59 I did the tour and then came back here in '60, then went back again and did the gates, and then came back at the end of '62.

ROGERS: You did a sculptural setting for May O'Donnell.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that was in '58. I did a lot of things for May O'Donnell. She is a great American dancer, and her husband is Ray Green, who is a composer. The last thing I did for her was in '58 when I did decor for a New York concert called Suspension. See, in '58--that was when I came to Aspen, you know--I did that and shipped it off, and then I came to Aspen.

ROGERS: Were these stage settings?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, she's a dancer. It's the decor.

ROGERS: I'm not familiar with it. Was it painting or



structural piece or a . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, no, it's a suspension; it's a sculpture. It's up in space, a big sculpture that is suspended. I think there's a picture of it someplace.

ROGERS: How did this relationship with her come about?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I met her in San Francisco. So I did a lot of decor for her in San Francisco in the forties.

ROGERS: This was the relationship that you had been carrying on then from before?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, yes, yes, they came there during the war, she and her husband.

ROGERS: Would this piece be on stage during the whole performance?

FALKENSTEIN: No, it was one of the most important pieces. I think she had about six pieces and this was one of the most important. In fact it's still in her vocabulary. It's called Suspension. She's in England I think right now, dancing. She has a group. She's a great artist, really.

ROGERS: How would you design a piece like that? Would you see her do the dance and then do the piece? You'd be inspired by watching her and see what you would do with it?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure. This was the second time I had done it. I had done the suspension piece for her in San Francisco and she wanted another one, a new piece. So I



did it in Paris. It was very interesting how that came about, because it had to be in New York at a certain time, and I had fallen in Milan. I'd been in Rome and had a show in '58 at Galleria Il Segno in Rome. I had to change trains in Milan, and I fell at the railroad station because it was snowing and I had gone from a dry part to a snowy part. So I fell on this hip. And oh, it was terrible. I managed to get back on the train. See, I had this commission to do when I got home. I got home and in Paris finally, but I was unable to put my toe down. [It was as if] I had an electric shock. And I thought, "How can I do it? How can I do it?" I went out to the American hospital and had an X ray, and they said, "Well, we can't see anything from the X ray. There's nothing broken, but you probably pulled a ligament or something, or hurt the socket in some way. But the only thing for you to do is to stay here in the hospital, and then we can observe you." And I said, "No, I can't because I've got to work. I can't stay in the hospital." [laughter] So I said, "Is there any doctor here that will look at me at home? I can arrange some way if I lie in bed. I can lie in bed and do some models, and then maybe I'll be better, and then I can execute it." Well, they said no. Well, I had a friend who knew a homeopathic doctor. I don't know whether you know what homeopathy or whatever it is, is, but it's a way of treating you with very tiny little bits of poison





which are supposed to make the body resist. I don't understand the principle. I mean, I think this is the principle. They give you tiny little pills of poison very often, and your body begins to make an immunity to them, and that's supposed to make you so immune to whatever you have. The best thing was that at least I lay down on this bed. I strung wire across so that I could hang models on it, and as I worked I could do it. Well, I called up my shipper, Lefebvre-Foinet, and I said, "Would you mind coming, because I have had an accident and I can't come, but I want to find out from you the very latest time that I can ship in order to get something there at this certain time." So he came over. He says, "Well, now, if you can manage to finish it by such and such, the very last moment, we can get it there." Then I had this homeopathic doctor looking at me and giving me these little pills; I was paying attention and taking them, and then working. And I remember Darthea--she was this friend who was the cultural attaché--would come over and bring chicken. You know, this is something that's very interesting: see, I'd been living there for eight years in this area, and it's like a little village. It's Saint-Germain-des-Prés, one street back from the Seine; it was an old concierge's lodge. I told you about that. So I was acquainted with the whole street, and the whole street was acquainted with me: the baker, butcher, the wineseller, the vegetable woman, everybody. And what do



you know? The whole street knew I had this thing. They all came in, they cleaned my place, they fed me, and took care of me. Here was this American woman artist laid up, and these people, just ordinary little people, took care of me. I wonder if it would happen here that way; I don't know. I think it was just so unusual. Because I wasn't a friend particularly; I just lived there.

ROGERS: It surprised you then that they knew you were sick and that they knew you existed there.

FALKENSTEIN: They just knew everything about me, everything. They knew I was sick, and they knew I needed help. So I thought, "Well, gee, this is the life of Riley." And also another person who was very helpful--'course I couldn't buy anything; I couldn't even go out, you know, so they would take care of me--but also the proprietor's daughter-in-law, the propriétaire's daughter-in-law would bring me these marvelous steaks. I thought, you know, "Well, why should I ever get well? This is just marvelous." Darthea would come over with chicken; somebody else would come over with something else.

So I finally got the model the way I liked it, and then I had to hobble around and try to execute it. I lay on my bed--see, I had never used copper up to this time. All of my equipment was geared to small-scale wire. I mean, I had a bellows; I didn't even have oxygen and acetylene. I just had a bellows with natural gas, so



I'd have to pump to get my oxygen, you see. So to get enough heat to do a larger-scale thing was going to be something. As I lay there, I began to think, "Well, what will I do, 'cause I have to have a line that will project in this theater?" I had been using iron, and iron is heavy, and if I got a big iron thing it would be too heavy for a line. Then I thought, "Well, why don't I use tubing?" But iron tubing is impossible (you can't bend it). So then I thought of copper tubing, and that was when I began to use copper tubing. That was it. So that started me on copper. I managed to finish it just in time, and the shipper came over and took everything. Well, so it went off to America. Everybody was laughing because New York is getting this decor from Paris. Little do they know how it was made.

ROGERS: Who was this commission for?

FALKENSTEIN: May O'Donnell.

ROGERS: Oh, this was May O'Donnell's piece here. All right.

FALKENSTEIN: This was the decor, this was Suspension.





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ROGERS: We were discussing the piece that you made for May O'Donnell and the fact that she was very worried that the piece hadn't arrived the night of the performance.

Do you want to finish that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the only thing to say is that it did arrive and they used it in the performance. As a matter of fact, they still have it, and they still use it.

ROGERS: Well, you mentioned that the truck had just pulled up as they were pulling away, thinking they were going to have to do without it. I guess that was one of those eleventh-hour . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, they really thought that they wouldn't have it, and they went to the theater. They started out for the theater very disappointed that they didn't have it, and then here came this truck with it, just trundling up the street, just at the moment they were getting into the car to go to the theater. Of course, that meant a fantastic, whirlwind installation. They were in boxes; I mean, the thing had to be unpacked and had to be figured out. And it wasn't that easy, because I had to give directions, and they had to follow the directions on how to put it together. But they did. And I guess it worked. [laughter] But I had worked with her before, so she



understood me and was very happy with the piece.

ROGERS: Throughout the years you have done some work with filming. I would like to have a conversation with you about your film work, how it started, and what forms it has taken as far as the work that you've done with it.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, a great part of my being as a creator is towards graphics. And I consider photography and cinema as a graphic medium. Cinema is one of the most avant-garde graphic media. So my attitude about film is that I'm just extending myself in graphics with the use of imagery in motion. I have done quite a few films, and one film which I consider a really original point of view. I call it Recharging the Image. I did this about four years ago by tearing magazines and photographing an image in the becoming, because as you would tear a page, as you went through the magazine, the image would be revealed. Right now, I am having stills of this process at the Los Angeles county museum in a show at this moment. The idea is that through this action of going through a magazine, you establish motion. It's a very original concept, and it's almost with a popular concept, because you're using something which is popular, a magazine, and using the images as they appear as you tear a page and you reveal a part of the image. Then you go to the next page and you reveal more of that image, and so on. You go right through the magazine by tearing. Do you understand what I mean?



ROGERS: I'm afraid I don't, without either seeing it or hearing a little more about what type of an image it is that appears.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the image is there. It's in the magazine. Here's a photograph of a man, and you're about four pages back, and as you tear, you come closer and closer to that man--finally the man is revealed.

ROGERS: You remove whole pieces of the pages ahead of time?

FALKENSTEIN: That's it, that's it. And as the pages are removed--not the whole page, but sections--then more and more is revealed. And then you go past him to another image.

ROGERS: Does every page have something done to it?

FALKENSTEIN: Almost. I mean sometimes. . . . And then a rhythm is established. See, this is all done by stop-action, holding action with the frame. You see, you use the stop-frame action: you don't just press the button and zing through, but you hold the frames, so that you have to establish a rhythm of time elements; you hold some and you let some go through very quickly. And this is felt. I mean, there's no way of determining; you just feel it. In fact, I can't describe it. You have to see it. I mean, I can't describe it any more than that.

ROGERS: It is on display now, did you say?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, this thing was sent for a Ciné prize,



and it went through the New York jury and it is now in the Library of Congress (it has a card in the Library of Congress). But it didn't get through the Washington jury. But I'm just about ready to do another one, and I'm going to attempt again to push it through. This was the first time I attempted it. I think now I could do it even better. The music was done by Terry Riley, who is one of the best, the most contemporary composers in America; and it was just, absolutely marvelous. I'll show it to you sometime. It's only three minutes long, but it has innumerable, innumerable images, because of the technique. But you see, I'm not a photographer in the classic sense. I'm a photographer in the experimental sense. And I look for ways of extending my own graphic sense, my graphic media, you understand?

ROGERS: The camera is just another tool.

FALKENSTEIN: The camera is just another tool for graphics for me. I'm not out there doing stories or that sort of thing. It's imagery.

ROGERS: Do you do it all yourself?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I do it on my own. And I don't have any technical aides. I do it right over there by the window. On the floor. [laughter]

ROGERS: What other things have you done with film? When did you first experiment?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, how I got started in film, I was writing for Arts and Architecture in the late forties, and I was





living in Berkeley. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] The San Francisco museum had a program called "Art in Cinema." So I decided to do an article on it. I went over to every performance at the museum, I met everybody who had films in it, I met the organizers of "Art in Cinema," I did the article, and everybody was happy. And they said, "Claire, look, you've gone through all this. Why don't you make a film?" So there was a person who was a producer, and he said, "Look, I will get a cameraman for you and a camera and buy the film, and then you work out anything you want." At just that moment there was an exhibition at the Legion of Honor of mobiles and articulated sculpture. And I was in the exhibition (I had three pieces). So I thought, "Well, why don't I do a film of this exhibition?" So I decided I would try it. So I went ahead. I wrote the script and had the film, did the filming, and I called it Touching the Quick. So I showed it then at "Art in Cinema," when I finished it. And at just that moment I left for Europe. So I took the film with me, and I showed it at Cinemathèque, in Paris, and I showed it in Amsterdam, and I showed it at UNESCO. And then I brought it home with me, and I haven't looked at it since. Now, it was shown in Amsterdam in the early fifties, and that was probably the last time it was shown. So the other day, now that this documentary is being done on me by this other producer, she wanted to see this film I'd done. I never did



anything about distribution or anything; I just showed it, and that was it. It was like private showings. And so looking at it again, I thought it might be interesting now, with all my experience and more development, if I would re-edit it and put it out for distribution. So we're going to do that, after all these years. But it's a historical piece. I've got Duchamp in there, and I've got everybody in there. It's just very interesting. But it needs reediting.

ROGERS: How did you come to name it Touching the Quick?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was touching life. "Touching the quick" is to touch life. And what I did was to associate nature and art, really. I used the exhibition just as a point of departure, and the things in the exhibition were related to nature in various ways. The ocean, fire, all kinds of associations, a beating heart--I'm trying to think of all the things that are in there. It's kind of a documentary but there's also a stream of consciousness quality about it. It was very avant-garde at the time, because people just weren't doing stream of consciousness things. Now it's quite usual.

ROGERS: Were there any subtitles, or was there a voice-over in it?

FALKENSTEIN: No, and I never got that far with it. I got only to the film, and the person who was to do the music never did. So now if I redo it, I will do it with sound and with commentary. This is one of the things I'll be



doing now--it will be one of my projects to redo that film because many of the people who are in there are dead now, like Duchamp and quite a few other artists.

ROGERS: It is an historical piece then.

FALKENSTEIN: It's historical.

Well, after that, I did some short things. For instance, when I was in Spain I did a short film on Gaudi [Gaudi]. And I always was doing footage of my own work. So when I came back here in '62, I put together a documentary on my own work [Structures and People], and I show it all the time when I lecture, but it only brings my work up to '65. So I have footage now on all these pieces, and I've got to get it together now in another film. But the only really sheer creative thing I did was this Recharging the Image; and that wasn't photographing objects, or photographing things, but in the medium itself there was something. And that was the only thing that I feel that was a really creative statement. The other things are, you know, photographing objects and things, places and so on.

ROGERS: The fact that you documented your own work so thoroughly by film must have given you a sense of history, that you wanted to preserve the techniques of pieces you were doing at a certain point in time. Now you find that you've put them together into a documentary type of thing that shows you at work. What prompted you to do that? What is the basic feeling that you had?





FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, from the beginning, artists are schooled in presenting their work. I mean, you do photographs to show what you do. And there's no way to show really what the work is, especially if you're a sculptor, by a photograph. The only way is through moving with the camera around the piece. And here I was in Europe, doing these things, and I knew that I wouldn't be there forever. Here I was doing these things, especially the big things, you know, the gates down in Italy and all that; and I haven't documented everything--don't worry--but I did document some of the most important things to me, and I did this film. But you'd be amazed, when I show that film now, when I lecture, how people respond. I mean, I'm not a cineast, or whatever you want to call me. I'm not a cinematographer--I am a sculptor--and so naturally it is not a professional job. But it's done from the artist's point of view, and they feel it, the people feel it, and they accept the fact that it isn't a professional film and that it's done by me of my work. They look, and afterwards they tell me how much they get out of it.

ROGERS: Do you keep a journal, too?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't keep a journal in the formal sense, but I keep a log, I'd say, of my activities. And then I keep notes; I have several books that I write in. But everything's all mixed up. I mean, I may go back to a book that I haven't touched for ten years and start



writing in it again, you know. I'm not disciplined about keeping it chronologically. If anybody ever wanted to look me up in my books, they'd have to get about ten books, and they'd have to be working over all of them. I think I get a kick out of that, rather than just being disciplined about it.

ROGERS: Are these the books that you sketch ideas that you have, and thoughts. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. Most of the pieces that I've ever done are in these books, I mean preliminary drawings and ideas that probably I never will do.

ROGERS: In looking back over them, do you ever look at them and find you've outgrown the idea?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, some of the times I look back, I find things that I have done, and I'm amazed, you know, that I was able to project something and then later do it. I find how I needed to clarify myself with these drawings before I started on the project. For instance, when I did the Sun Series, I did about, oh, I don't know, eighteen Suns. But before I even started to do the Suns, I had to clarify, what was I doing and why was I doing it? And it's all there; it's all down in the book.

ROGERS: Do you ever have false starts?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know what you mean by a false start.

ROGERS: Well, let's say that you become very excited and you think you've got something worked out pretty well, but



when you come to actually executing it, it just doesn't work.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, sure, lots of times, absolutely. But in the long run, it isn't a false start, because what your failures are, are feelers into something that will come off, maybe not that way but in another way. And if you're unwilling to feel into the unknown, to go into the unknown and to fail, you'll never do anything. This is part of the business of being creative. You have to be willing to go into the unknown and be willing to not pursue it if it doesn't work out.

ROGERS: In my research on you, I ran across a sentence where you said about the moving point that you first became conscious of it as a sign when you made an animated film.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right. That was again for May O'Donnell. I was in New York, and she was going to do a performance, and she says, "Claire, wouldn't it be great if we had an animated film and I danced to that." And I said, "Fine." So then I started thinking about animated-- I'd never thought about an animated film. I could do it now myself, but I didn't have a camera, and I didn't have the possibility of experimenting with a camera to find out what to do. But I went ahead on drawings. I had to go back to Europe; I guess that was 1960--yes, it was 1960 because I had a show in Rome. I had a show in Rome, and



I had a show in Paris, and I had a show in New York. So after my New York show I went to Paris, and I started drawing. I was drawing with a felt pen and ink on a pad of paper, and it was a pad that was about, oh, I would say about 8 x 12, something like that. It was a rectangle. So when I got on the train to go to Paris, I went third class; I was sitting up all night, so I thought I might as well draw. And I drew. I started drawing. And by the time I got to Rome, from Paris, which was--what was it?--about two days (isn't it?), a two-day ride (one night, one day, one night and one day; two nights and two days), and here I was, drawing and drawing and drawing on the train. Well, I finally clarified myself through all this drawing, through this continuous drawing, to come to a single stroke. Before, I was doing all kinds of things when I started out, and it finally came down to the single stroke. You know, it just was a development. So then when I got to Rome . . . That was when? It was '59, that's when it was, because that's my first moving-point drawing. By the time I got to Rome, I was doing moving-point drawings. So when I showed, had an exhibition in Rome, I did a big one, a great big moving-point drawing. And it was because of all this drawing on the train, all the way down. And that was in the exhibition. That was part of the exhibition.

ROGERS: You made a comment when you were explaining your work in one of the catalogs that the moving point was





kind of the alpha and the omega.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, to me, the moving point is like a birth, a maturing, and a death--the point. Because each time you make the point, it's a new start. And then it matures as you cover the surface. And when the whole thing is complete, you can consider it a whole and a finished work. But each point has its birth, and its maturing is in conjunction with other points, and then finally when the whole is completed, it becomes the ensemble or the whole. I wouldn't call it a death; I'd call it . . .

ROGERS: . . . a closing of the circle?

FALKENSTEIN: No, not a closing of the circle, but it's the extension of the surface to bring about the ensemble or the whole, the work.

ROGERS: You used this in connection with magnetic fields, didn't you? How did you do that?

FALKENSTEIN: No, not magnetic fields--fields, just plain fields, a field structure. For instance, when one point becomes two points and three points and four points, and they follow and then they become a structure, it becomes a field. That's when it matures and you get--you start, and one point finally generates a surface. That's what I mean by a field: the generation of a whole surface.

ROGERS: You have done some extensive studying into Pythagorean geometry, haven't you?



FALKENSTEIN: No, I haven't. But intuitively, and through my studies, I know what the Euclidian principles are, enough to realize why perspective came about through those ideas. I mean, it's not for me to start talking about Euclidian geometry in relation to perspective; I mean, that's the Renaissance notion. But the reason I talk about it is because it has to do with the contrast of the kind of world we live in. I mean, that's one notion of the world. And our notion of the world is in relativity, now. It's an entirely different attitude. But don't worry, Euclidian geometry is still part of the vocabulary of geometry as we know it and use it in our time also. But it isn't the essential notion that guides us into new forms and new ideas, you know what I mean?

ROGERS: When you start to do a piece, you have your sketches and your preliminary drawings, you've made a model, and then you're ready to start on a large piece. Does something happen between the time you begin on that large piece and the time you've finished? Does this inanimate object, this piece of material, take on a life of its own?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'll tell you, when you're doing a small piece, you have to have a vision of what you want. I mean, you have to have a sense of scale, even in a small piece. The small piece will have to be adjusted in a way of structure and so on. But the vision and the scale has



to be within that small piece to be projected into the larger piece. I mean, you can't start with a little idea and expect just to enlarge it and have it get big and that's it, because it will always look small. I don't know whether you understand me, but scale is one of the most important concepts for an artist to have, especially if they do large-scale work. And that's the reason some people, some artists, never are able to be successful in doing public works, because they just don't have that sense of scale. I'm trying to think of something recently that I saw that did not have it, a big piece that looked small; it didn't have that sense of scale. I'm trying to think of it. Was it in Chicago? But as an example of what happens, even though your piece has a sense of scale, when you enlarge a piece from a model, you always have to adjust the structure, because the weight of materials and the material itself, in being enlarged, changes character, so that you have to adjust proportions and so on to hang onto your vision.

ROGERS: Does it actually stay pretty close, though, to the original drawing or sketch or feeling. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you know, I always hope that when I do something as an idea and make a model, that when I actually do the piece, it's better, because then I am able to infuse into the final piece my intention and my original vision. The model is a working-out of ideas, but the projection of





the final scale cannot be felt until you really do the final thing. Let's say you can feel it, it can be implied and all that, but still you don't get the full quality of it until you get the total, final result. And that's the reason most people say of my work, "Oh, I like it better now than in the model." Well, of course, you know, because I've had a chance to work it out the way I originally intended to. One example is that piece at USC now. The scale of that Montage Section--if you look at the model in the studio (it's still there, you know) and then you try to remember how it looked when you saw it in the building, you'll see what I mean: how actually, when it becomes an actual piece, the way you intended it to be, the model is just an implication, really.

ROGERS: It's been said of your work that you won't let the media limit you, that your ideas seem to be able to be expressed against what the media would ordinarily allow an artist to do.

FALKENSTEIN: Who said that?

ROGERS: Sheet metal and . . .

FALKENSTEIN: [laughter] You don't know who said that? The only thing I can say is that I'm free with my media. Like some people say, "Claire, you're more free in your sculpture than you are in your painting," especially when I'm doing the moving point, which is a very rigorous kind of discipline, whereas the sculpture is very free. I mean,



I don't think that's true always, but they think in terms of some of my copper-tubing sculpture. But for instance, that piece on the ceiling there of sheet metal, I mean, that's very true to the material. How can you think of treating it any simpler than that, and more truly, huh?

ROGERS: Well, what I was trying to discuss with you was that when you work with a piece that's as large and inorganic as a piece of sheet metal, let's say, there are certain things that it can't do, it just won't do. It will either break or it won't give you the curve, the bend, or the sensuality that you want from a piece. So you're limited in your design from that respect.

FALKENSTEIN: Of course, you don't go against the material, I never go against the material. You can't say I was going against the material in that piece, can you?

ROGERS: No.

FALKENSTEIN: Then what are you talking about? [tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: The fact that you were documenting the things that you did in Europe on film, underlying all that, there must have been a subconscious feeling that perhaps you were going to leave it and you were going to come back to the United States.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I knew I was coming back. I never thought that I was going to change my citizenship when I went away. All I knew was that I had to have this



experience to understand and realize what my roots were in an artistic way. I wanted to meet the masters, whom I considered more important than anybody else in art, and I wanted to see the art of the past. I mean, after all, what chance have we here except through . . . Oh, we have a little more now, but in the forties and fifties, most of the time we were looking at reproductions or one painting at a time. We never saw some of the great buildings and some of the great works of art of the past. That's what I wanted to see. So I never went away considering I was going to stay away.

ROGERS: While you were in Europe, did you ever hear of Southern California, and did you see any of the work in Europe?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, look, Southern California, honestly. Southern California compared to Paris, compared to the Renaissance as it was shown, as it was evident in Italy-- I mean, who's interested in Southern California, for God's sake? Look, now, Southern California is part of the world, and it has its contribution. And every part of America, I consider, has a part, has a contribution. And I think it has kind of equaled out, I mean for the contemporary idea. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

Well, I just kind of feel that I am a part of the world, and I never would have felt that if I hadn't gone away, if I had just stayed in Berkeley all my life. But



now I feel that I am really part of the total world. I feel as though I'm part of the total universe. And it's only because of ideas and visions and attitudes and notions that have come about through working in various places, and especially working in crucial situations in Europe, where you have this residue of the history of the art of the past and the great art, the strong statements of Michelangelo and Picasso and so on. And I just feel that now this has been absorbed by the world, and that all places are possible to work in--anyplace is possible--if you have an interior to work out, if you know what I mean. Finally it comes to the point where an artist has to look into himself and not just outside. And when you do that, you can work anyplace. And I also feel that in America, there is this resurgence of vitality, and probably we have more contemporary artwork happening here in America than anyplace else. I know in Japan they are looking toward America, and also in Europe they're looking toward America for the contemporary impetus.

ROGERS: Well, my question was directed to know whether or not you were aware of any artists who lived in this vicinity who were exhibiting in Europe.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, well, I have the feeling that there are a lot of artists living here who have dealers in Europe and dealers in New York who send shows to Europe. I myself have a gallery where I still show in Europe, in Paris, and also in Venice, in Italy. I mean, I don't consider it any





more important, let's say, than showing in New York or San Francisco or Los Angeles, because finally what you do is disseminated over everywhere anyway--I mean, through magazines, through criticism, through traveling shows. For instance, there's a show now in San Francisco called "Two Hundred Years of California Art," and the whole show is going to travel to Washington, D.C. And I don't know what's going to happen after that--how do I know? Maybe it will go on to Europe. But now the communication is such that there isn't that provincialism anymore.

ROGERS: You consider yourself an artist of the world who just happens to live in Los Angeles, then, and who is working out of Los Angeles as your base.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right.

ROGERS: Not influenced by Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I don't think that you can help but be influenced by your environment, but likewise you influence the environment, you make the environment. So I think I've put my mark here on Los Angeles, too. But I think it's a mutual thing. I think we take and we give, as long as you're alive. If you're a dead old stick-in-the-mud, maybe you don't contribute and you don't take, I don't know. But I'm not a dead old stick-in-the-mud.

ROGERS: You definitely have contributed. What have you taken?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'm trying to think. I came here with



copper tubing; I'd used that and I'm still using it. I hadn't used corten steel before--now, this is in materials--I'd never used corten steel. I used corten steel in the church, and I want to use it more and more. I'm just now entering into stainless steel. I never had worked in sheet metal to this extent. Now, this is in terms of the materials. Now, ideas are influenced by the materials in the sense that what you can do in one thing you can't do in something else. And with the sheet metal, the continuum that I used to work out through my Net Structures, I'm coming into a continuum with the sheet metal, the sense of the continuing surface action. I'm trying to think of what new has come into my work. I'm doing three-dimensional drawings; I never did a three-dimensional drawing before I came here. Now, it isn't that I've seen a three-dimensional drawing, because I haven't; I haven't seen anybody else do a three-dimensional drawing. As a matter of fact, the closest to that etching over there--that three-dimensional etching--is Boccioni, and Boccioni lived in the early part of the century in Italy. So that can't be much from Los Angeles.

Now, the only thing I can think about that Los Angeles offers is not a direct influence, but it's an indirect influence in the sense that this is a frontier town, it's a sort of a frontier town, and there's a sense of liberty here to do things. You don't feel handicapped by too many traditions that are hampering. I think that, for instance,



in New York you had a real strong influence, and probably still do, of--well, no, no, you still don't now, because now you have the big pop art artists there--but for a while you had this abstract expressionist attitude, and everybody was doing it. Well then, I suppose now it's pop, and maybe everybody is doing pop. I don't know. I haven't lived in New York. But here it's dispersed; I mean, there's a lot of individuality here. I don't know whether it's because we don't have the mass media (the strong magazines and so on that help to formulate what is being done and with criticism and so on), and we don't have the big market that's in New York. And we don't have the big, strong galleries that are in New York, so there isn't that sense of obligation to do certain things in order to get paid, in order to make a living. But here everything is a little freer and more open. And you work a lot here, I think, for the love of it and for externalizing your ideas on your own because that's what you like to do.

ROGERS: Then the openness and the freedom to express yourself is one of the things that you like best about living here.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: But if you're going to have that, you don't have the market, you don't have the galleries like they do in New York. What about the economics of being an artist?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's not as good, see. But it could





be--probably it's good for more people in a less way, whereas there it's very good for a very few because of the mass media and the publicity and all that.

ROGERS: Should there be a strong art journal in Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. I think the more criticism and the more magazines, the better. Artforum started here, didn't it? Or did it start in San Francisco? I think it started in San Francisco, and then it moved to New York. And now you have another one, Art Week, in San Francisco. I don't think that Los Angeles has any really important art magazine now. Do you know of any?

ROGERS: Well, there's the LAICA [L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art] Journal.

FALKENSTEIN: The what? Oh, that, yeah. But that's so sort of academic. I wish that they would get a different format for that. It's hard to read; it's hard to look at.

ROGERS: They have revolving editors, that is, guest editors that are supposed to give a democratic concept to the journal. Each one is . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it always looks alike, though. I mean, the format is alike. Very small print: it's forbidding. It's not really a welcoming magazine, do you think? Do you ever read it?

ROGERS: I don't read it in toto, no.

FALKENSTEIN: I've just tried to look at it, and it's forbidding.



ROGERS: Are you inclined--well, you must be inclined to think in these terms, being in graphics and being a writer: if you were going to design a journal, what would it look like?

FALKENSTEIN: It certainly wouldn't look like that. I think Art Week is very good, I think it's a very economical production, and yet it invites you to look at it. Do you know Art Week? Do you see the difference? I think they both want to be economical, but one of them invites you to look at it, and the other one forbids you to. [laughter]

ROGERS: You mentioned that you used the corten steel in the church. Let's talk about the work you did for Saint Basil's. What was the first initial contact that you had with the principals of the church?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, this is based on the same concept as my never-ending screen, only it has become three-dimensional and very rigid, that is, very hard, straight planes, because of the material. That shows you how the material influences you. I was called in to do this because the person who was the designer [Bozidar von Serda] knew my work over a period of two years and realized what I could do. So I was asked to design the windows and the doors. It was done for the A.C. Martin architects. And I was brought in to carry this work through, as I say, because they knew what I could do. Now there were certain things they wanted me to work into the concept. But the basic form, of course,



was all worked out spontaneously as I designed the windows, very spontaneously. I started out on the flat, never-ending screen again, just the same way, with the interstice always off parallel and the shapes never repeating, that is, the interior shapes never repeating. And then when I had the basic form--now, these are the models I'm doing--when I had the basic form, then I'd begin to raise up and get my three dimensions, by raising up the planes from the base and doing it on the diagonal and supporting my planes as I went. And there's an example of a vision of scale, because I could envision how big they would be when I did them small. But I could not control always the weight of the material, and that was something that happened later when they were enlarged. When I was in the factory and they were being enlarged, the weight of the material made it necessary to add a structure to the windows in order to hold the weight, that is, supports, braces. So I had an engineer working with me, and he and I had to redo the bracing. He would have to know exactly where the stress was, and then I would have to do the proper kind of designing so it would work in with the general design of the window. I mean, he would have just simply put in a thing like that to hold the window up, just a perpendicular brace, and that's impossible; I mean, it would spoil the whole thing. So I had to say, "No, you can't do that. It has to go such and such a way in order



to work with the design."

So that thing started in '66. I was just finishing my work on the Fresno Mall, and I was invited to do a trial module--not a model but a module. See, I did the module before I did any models. In fact, I did no model for this module; I simply went ahead and did this full-scale thing in my studio, which is out in the yard there.

ROGERS: That's about twelve feet high?

FALKENSTEIN: It's a little higher; it's about fifteen feet.





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ROGERS: You were saying that the module was about fifteen feet high.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and I did this alone, here in the studio, without any architectural suggestions, because the designer was in Europe. So when he came back, it was all finished. And the cardinal had to be treated very carefully, because he was considering another person or another way of treating the windows at St. Basil (there was a regular church window manufacturer in Brussels). So it was really between having something conventional and having something creative. And in order to determine whether it would be this or whether it would be something conventional, I did this module. The church had not been built, of course, and they were just planning; they were in the planning stage of the church. So they made a little house on the site, down there on Wilshire, for this module, and they put it up. And the cardinal would go in and sit and look at it. It took about six months for him to make up his mind, and all the time I was waiting for the decision--would they go ahead or not?

ROGERS: Did they place the module in the same exposure that it would be in the finished church?

FALKENSTEIN: This was never used in the finished church.



ROGERS: No, what I mean to say is, in this little house, did they put the module in the same exposure as the way the sun would move on the finished church when it was finished?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but the windows go all around the church, so it didn't matter which direction they put it, because you have exposure from the north, from the west and from the east on these windows, and also south. So it didn't matter what direction they put it. But the main thing was that it was in a darkened room, and that you only had the window to look through and that was it. So he decided, yes, he wanted it, after about six months.

Then I began making the models. I mean, I was given the job and began to make the models. And it's very interesting, because it was a hassle. It was such a big job, and it took so much organization of--I had to commission Bethlehem Steel to make the steel; I had to commission the glass to be made, had to think about the factory in which it would be built, all of them. I mean, finally, it turned out there were--how many?--fifteen windows. Or were there more? Three, five, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen--yes, there were fifteen windows finally. The nave and the narthex went up 80 feet, and then the tower windows 130 feet. So it was really a fantastic job. They would go up 80 feet and be only 2-1/2 feet wide, or 18 inches wide. So to get something



moving and exciting in that width and to go up that height in that technique was a real problem. Well, so in the module I foresaw getting the job, so I made my vocabulary a color; the sixteen colors are in that module. None of the other windows have sixteen colors. I mean, not one of the windows has sixteen colors. But because I wanted to see how the color would look through transparency I made the module to have all the colors. So then the factory in Long Beach manufactured color after color and then we estimated--but it was just an estimation--how much I would need, because I didn't know. I hadn't designed them yet. See, I had finally to work out the models as the shop was manufacturing them, I mean, making them. I hate to use the word manufacture, but, you know, carrying them through.

ROGERS: Fabricating.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. So I was doing the model, and then I'd take them to the factory. I think I was on a schedule of one model for every five days, and it lasted for about a year and a half. Of course, there was the weekend off and there were some holidays, but in general, that's the way it was. So it was a going thing. I was creating; they were making. And then I was there--when I wasn't working on a new model, I was down at the factory supervising the fabrication. And it was really something.

So I finally finished, and then it came time for--





they had to be weathered and cured, and corten steel normally takes about two years before it establishes that surface. Now, the reason corten steel is very good is because it has a high nickel content, and the surface oxidizes and forms a protective coating. Therefore, you have no maintenance; you don't have to paint it; you don't have to polish it. Finally it's like bronze, and it's great, great material. So all of the windows were finished, and they were out there--they had rented a big yard and secured it, and they had to be out in the air for curing because they weren't to be put up, supposedly, for two years. Otherwise, if it rained, the rust would fall down onto the building and stain it. As it was, we never did get to two years; I think we got about eight months curing and that's all, because of the deadlines, you know, always.

ROGERS: Did they rust after that? After they were installed?

FALKENSTEIN: No, they were pretty good. There was a little bit of staining, but not much.

ROGERS: Did you have much breakage?

FALKENSTEIN: No. It went rather smoothly. The only problem was for me to supply them with a model every five days. I was working my head off. I remember my dealer from New York, Martha Jackson, was here at that time, and she loved to have my company; she loved to come down here and walk on the beach and so on. And here I was working



on my model, and I couldn't go walking with her. She says, "Oh, Claire, I'll be so glad when you're finished with that job. All you do is work." [laughter] And I couldn't go out walking with her.

Anyway, so aside from that, I mean I was making models, but then there came a time I had to work on the doors. And then I had to work on the rectory screen. By the way, I did the doors right here on this floor. I did most of my model paste-up for the church right over here by that window, right there, because it was good light. See, I had to work through summer and winter, and it got cold; and I have radiant heat in here, and I didn't have any heat in the studio. So there were certain things I could do in here, like the color. After I got my frame made, I used different colors of plastic, and I would have to cut them and glue them in the forms. I had quarter-inch-- everything was done to scale, exactly to scale. See, the material, the corten, they're made out of one-inch angle steel. So I was doing three inches to the foot. So, for fifteen feet and for one-inch material, one-inch angle, I had quarter-inch lengths of steel that I would put together. What I did was cut them and braze them. (I have all these models, by the way, in my storage, and that's part of the thing that will come over here.) [##]

But there were meetings with the priest and meetings with the monseignor (who was the secretary to the cardinal),



all these meetings and meetings and meetings and asking me questions and examining me, because they couldn't believe that I could do it. Here it was my concept, for gosh sakes, but they didn't realize that. They thought it was the architect's concept, but it wasn't.

ROGERS: Was there any opposition to doing the windows?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the opposition was among the young priests, and they wanted the conventional window. The only one who carried it through finally was the cardinal, and he is a man of culture. In one of the things, somebody raised the objection, "Well, look, how can they ever be cleaned?" And he said, "Well, I've been in Europe, and I've seen some of those wonderful stained-glass windows, and they're so dirty and so beautiful." [laughter] [##]

ROGERS: Were you excited about making these windows?

FALKENSTEIN: It was the largest, most ambitious kind of commission that one could think of. Frankly, I don't know of any commission that could be much bigger; I don't know of any. This is one of the biggest commissions ever given. And the responsibility was mine. I mean, it was my taste, my ideas, my vision, my everything, and I had to rely upon my experience with structure and so on. The thing about it that was exciting and devastating was not just the work but also the whole experience [##] of working with all these craftsmen and working with the big companies like Bethlehem Steel. I mean, this was really one of the most professional



kinds of operations that one could ever find oneself in. And you see, I haven't had anything like it before or since. I mean, I've done some big things, but nothing comparable. And maybe I'll never get a chance again in my lifetime; I don't know. Who knows? Maybe I'll do a bigger thing.

ROGERS: But you learned an awful lot doing it.

FALKENSTEIN: I certainly did. And I had to overcome a lot of things. For instance, I was working with this designer. He was my--what would you call him?--the go-between between me and the church.

ROGERS: Liaison.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, liaison--the church and the architects, this designer. It was he that I had known for two years before and who got me into the job. And then he turned out to be very difficult because he wanted to kind of take over. I had problems with him; and not only that, but he gave me some wrong dimensions. One window in the church, he gave me wrong dimensions, and after the whole thing was finished, [laughter] it didn't fit. See, I had to work with him because I had to rely on him as an architect for the church. So I then had to do the best I could to extend the window. It was too small; it was about six inches too small.

ROGERS: Too narrow, or too short?

FALKENSTEIN: Too narrow, the whole length.





ROGERS: The whole thing?

FALKENSTEIN: And it was his fault. Of course, if I had unlimited money and unlimited time, I could have redesigned the whole thing, but I couldn't. And there was no unlimited money. Everything was right down to the line in the budget. So it was impossible to redo another of them. The shop, the glass, the steel--everything was made for, you know, for the total order, and here was this mistake. And it was his dopey idea. But anyway, what I did was the best I could. For me it's very obvious, but I hope it isn't too obvious for everybody else. [##]

ROGERS: You designed the windows without seeing them all together as an entirety. And when you had them all installed . . .

FALKENSTEIN: But you know what? Because of this deep philosophy, every time I tackled a new window, I didn't look at the one I'd done before, I didn't care about the one I did before, but I tried to do it better. See, it's all the same philosophy. So there are windows down there--if I would go there with you sometime, I'd tell you how I improved as I worked. And finally, two or three of them are just fantastic. But it was like working through, you know, working through and finally coming to a real clear notion of what I was about.

Projection--I guess that's the word--they project into you, they project their . . .



ROGERS: You're talking about the personalities of the architect and . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No.

ROGERS: My thought with the windows was that when they were installed into the church that the sum of the whole was greater than the individual one. In other words, each one was beautiful in itself, but when you got all of them together, the total effect was something on a whole new dimension.

FALKENSTEIN: Did you see them?

ROGERS: I haven't been inside the church.

FALKENSTEIN: But you have seen them?

ROGERS: Yes.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, the reason is that they never got stale. They aren't decorative. There are surprises. When I was working, I had to keep myself interested. Here I was working, as I told you, spontaneously, with no plan to follow, but just working out of my spirit. And that's the reason they have this quality of surprise--did you notice?--and freedom: because each time I tackled it, it was as though (and I did this consciously: I didn't want to look at anything I'd done; I didn't want to see anything that would make me rely upon something I'd done before) I wanted each time to start freshly. So there's this kind of joyousness in the quality of them.

ROGERS: Don't you believe that being next to each other,



though, that they get something more; they give it a new dimension?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, sure, of course. I mean, it's like a gestalt, the gestalt attitude of the augmenting through-- I mean, you can't define the unit. You can only think in terms of the total, because it does change. It is a gestalt attitude.

ROGERS: Is there anything else that you feel you would like to say about the windows?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'll just tell you two or three things about the concept. The Catholic church is different from the Protestant church, and it has it's own development of ideas. For instance, from the narthex to the altar, you go through the passion. Now, I don't know what the Protestant--because I'm really not a churchgoer, and I don't know what the altar means, but it doesn't mean that. So what I did was to carry the passion, the idea of from cool to hot, as you go from the narthex (which is the entrance) to the altar. And you have very hot windows, very strong reds and a lot of reds, as you go towards the altar. That was one idea. And then the other idea was that because it's the never-ending screen, there is this sense of eternity and the sense of moving upward and allowing the motion of the planes to finally be dissolved on the roof, where you have no glass at all but simply going off into the air. So there are really basically





these two ideas of color and of form, and the form was the rising quality of the windows, to go as the never-ending screen, just going off into space. And I wrote this up. I've written about it, and the church has it all in a little pamphlet there. Of course, you know, at the time of the solstice, when the sun is at a certain point, you have the light, the color projected into the church going across the whole thing and crossing, colors crossing inside. And that's the thing that the people love. And that church is very popular, and really because of those windows.

ROGERS: It's been said that the color projections sometimes go forty-five feet.

FALKENSTEIN: That's right.

ROGERS: That must have been quite a thrill for you to have seen that all together.

FALKENSTEIN: See, the fact that it's a three-dimensional development of the never-ending screen in planes . . . See, I'd done it already with Peggy Guggenheim's gates, but with line. And this was with planes. The observer, in moving in the church, will get different qualities and different colors through the overlay of the planes, as one moves around and through. So when you look at the window here, from this point of view, it would not be the same as if you looked at the window from ten feet away, or twenty feet away. Because you'd have a different connection



or a different overlay of planes.

ROGERS: Did you know this was going to happen when you-- did you see all this before you saw it in reality?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, yes. No, when I was working on my models, I certainly knew it, sure. I mean, I projected my--for instance, as I told you before, you have to be able when you do a thing like this is to have a sense of scale, and I knew this would happen.

ROGERS: So there were no surprises for you.

FALKENSTEIN: No, the only surprise was when you have them actually up and they're in different positions than being right in front of you. I mean, they're up, and so you get a different perspective of it.

ROGERS: Up high, with the height of it.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: The initial mock-up and the final installation of the windows took up your time in 1967 and '68 . . .

FALKENSTEIN: . . . and '69. I started on the work of planning it in '66, but I didn't do the mock-up until '67.

ROGERS: Well, we jumped ahead a little bit on those three years from the time that you came in 1963 to '66. Perhaps we can fill those in by discussing the work that you did for the state college in Fullerton, California [California State University, Fullerton], and also the "U" as a Set for the First International Sculpture Symposium that was at the state college in Long Beach [California State



University, Long Beach]. Do you want to discuss those?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the head of the art department [Dr. John Olsen] and the head of the whole section on art was absolutely enamored of my fountain on Wilshire Boulevard. He was going around the world, but before he left he had me signed up really, and it was all set that I should do this piece for the gymnasium, for the facade, which was an eighty-foot wall, ten feet from the floor and eleven feet high. The building hadn't been built; it was just being built when I was brought in on it. I met the architect, and we had to decide what I was going to put my ideas on, what I was going to do, and what kind of a surface the architect would make to attach my piece. So I had the idea, because it was a gymnasium, to do a game wall. I called it Game Wall. And the games I thought of were really the symbolic, directional, linear structures which would proceed down the wall. So I cut out pictures from the newspaper of different kinds of games--of basketball and tennis, of swimming, of horseback riding, and all of that--and I made a book of these photos. And then I did a model, exactly to scale, and did my small symbolic signs and placed them on. And I took the model out then, because it had to be approved. The architect wasn't difficult, but the people like the dean of athletics and the coach and so on had to be considered. And I didn't know how--I mean, I thought, "How can I introduce them to this



idea of symbolic, linear gestures down the wall?" But I showed them the book of all these wonderful symbols that I had done--no, the book of the games--and then I showed them my symbolic treatment. They looked at the games and they got it; they saw what was happening, and they accepted me right off the bat. They really loved it. Now, that was done in '65 (that's eleven years), and actually there's nothing else practically on the campus; this thing is about the only outdoor sculpture they have, still. Well, so my friend came back from his round-the-world trip, and I was in the midst of a controversy, not from the teachers and not from the school, but from students. Again, students! They said, "This is junk sculpture." Isn't that funny?

ROGERS: Yes, that's very interesting.

FALKENSTEIN: I mean, we have this idea that the youth is so ahead, but they aren't. Most often not. Most often they're backward.

ROGERS: Perhaps this has something to do with their indoctrination to the arts. It's still a very traditional way of teaching it, particularly in the high school years. They're not exposed to any contemporary work in their curriculum. I don't say that they still aren't, but in the early sixties and fifties when they would be in high school. . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, anyway, there was all kinds of controversy. So he wrote a letter to the Times and





said, "Rather than to be so concerned about this sculpture, why don't you start getting concerned about the fact that the orange groves are dying off because of pollution and because of condominiums and so on." Anyway, he wrote a wonderful letter and said, "Now, that's where you should be putting your energy, not in this sculpture--which by the way is just a fine sculpture."

ROGERS: Did that quiet them down?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, they finally quieted down, yes. It's out there; they never took it down.

Well, while I was doing that, then I got the invitation to act in relation to the First International Sculpture Symposium at [California] State University at Long Beach. I had this need to reinforce my sculpture down on Wilshire Boulevard, my fountain; so I wanted to do something along the same philosophy. Everybody else on the symposium was using big industrial manufacturers. They were all doing their work for them. But I had about four assistants, and we did all our work ourselves. We hammered the tubes; we bent the tubes. In fact, some of it is just wonderful. I have some footage on this. There was one black fellow who worked with us and who was very athletic, and in order to bend them, you know--and here they are four-inch tubes, some of them, four inches (you know what four inches are? like that), and we had to anneal it, we had to anneal by hand and then we had to bend it,



get the shapes--and here he would run, make a leap and jump on them, you know. It was just wonderful to watch us work. We were the only ones. Everybody else had theirs out in a factory someplace being manufactured. Anyway, this piece was finally installed in front of the administration building, and it's right on Seventh Street. I don't know if you ever saw it, in that pool. I think it's one of the best big pieces I ever did. I think it's one of the successful pieces. And all the students like it. There was no problem with that piece.

ROGERS: What was the First International Sculptural Symposium?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, to tell you the truth how it came about-- I don't know too much about its history, but it was international and artists were invited from all over the world-- well, from Europe and Asia, from Japan and from America, from the East Coast. Frankly, I don't even know how many were on it, about fifteen. We weren't paid very much--our materials were paid, our living expenses were paid, and that was about all. The idea was that we would have a chance to do a large-scale sculpture--that was it.

ROGERS: Which would belong to the school?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, and you had to be willing to spend your time and your effort to give to that school. And I was just very glad to have a chance, as I say, to reinforce my piece on Wilshire Boulevard with another piece.



ROGERS: And how long did it last? Were you required . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I think it was about three months, something like that, two months.

ROGERS: So everyone there was required to finish their pieces in that three-month period?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but I don't know whether you've heard about it, but there was a lot of to-do, because some of the Europeans who came over here, although they had the prospectus, had signed the contract and knew that they weren't going to have any money from it. They thought they would make a lot of money even so. So when they found out they weren't, they went back home. [##]

ROGERS: Aside from working on your individual piece, was there any communication or interaction between the different sculptors?

FALKENSTEIN: Not much. Really not much. It was not really that worked out. There should have been. I mean, it should have been a symposium in the sense that there should have been some kind of action within the group in technical ways, in artistic ways, articulating ideas and so on. But there weren't. There was very little connection. I think it was just like in the big outdoor world of competition: everybody was trying to outdo everybody else. And in a way, maybe, it couldn't be otherwise, because there was difficulty in funding it and there was difficulty in getting the materials. In fact, it was full of





difficulties. But finally it . . . .

ROGERS: Who did fund it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was funded by corporations and individuals. It wasn't funded by the state or the school.

ROGERS: Were there some exciting things done?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, there were, there are. Have you gone over there and looked? It's one of the most interesting campuses just because of this work on it.

ROGERS: Was there ever a Second International Sculpture Symposium?

FALKENSTEIN: I never heard of one, not around here. There must be. I mean, there must be. And why it's the "First" International Sculpture Symposium--I think there must have been another one someplace. Why it was a "symposium"--I don't know why it was a symposium, because we never sat down and had a symposium. I mean, my idea of a symposium is to exchange ideas and have a moderator and do some talking and so on. What it was, was just grouping art, getting some artists together to do big-scale works.

ROGERS: And leave them there.

FALKENSTEIN: That's it.

ROGERS: Was there any critique made, any final wrap-up, any kind of a ceremony or a touring of all the pieces with some kind of a tying it all up?

FALKENSTEIN: There was, except I'll tell you what the difficulty was: everybody came and left at odd times;



no one came at the same time; everybody left at another time. Somebody would finish and leave, another one would finish and leave, then another one would come in and do it, and so on. So it really wasn't that highly organized. But the work is there, and the work is good. On the whole, I think I'd have to go back and I'd have to look at it again, but . . . And then some students did a piece, you know; everybody got sort of excited, so some students got together and they did a marvelous piece of wood ties, a beautiful piece. A big one. Nice.

ROGERS: And at the same time that you were . . . .

FALKENSTEIN: By the way, I was the only woman on it. I was the only woman on the Fresno Mall, too. I still am the only woman; they haven't gotten any other woman for that mall.

ROGERS: How did that commission come about?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, after I had finished the symposium, the commission of the Fresno Mall then came through in '66. So that happened right after the symposium. They were working in Fresno, the businessmen--a lot of them were Sunday painters, Sunday sculptors, collectors in a modest way. And they were the ones to make that mall. I mean, they funded it and were the committee of choice, of getting the artists. So over a period of years--it didn't happen simultaneously--it went on and on and on. One of the persons on the committee for choosing the



artist was a woman; her name is Ella Ordorfer. Ella was a teacher; she had been teaching in the university there for years and years and was like a pillar in the community in education. Well, years before, when I was a student, I had a grant to go to Mills College in the summer to study with Archipenko, and there was Ella, a graduate student from the East or Middle West or something, who came in and studied with Archipenko. So she remembered me after all these years. So she came down to Los Angeles--now, this was '65, and my last show at the Robles Gallery was in '64. But out of the show was bought something for--it was the first thing bought for the sculpture garden at the Long Beach museum. So I still had dealings with them, because this piece was a kind of a commission piece, and it came out of the fact that I'd had the show. I mean, all these people who were at Long Beach had seen my work, and although I wasn't really showing with them, from that last show was this piece. Also from the last show, I still had--people found me through the Robles Gallery. So she came down to the Robles Gallery to look for me. It was really funny because she came and asked for me, and I said, "Well, I'd like to take you to see the fountain I did." You see, I wanted to show her the smaller things. See, the big fountain on Wilshire was too big; she wanted to see something more intimate. So I said, "Well, I did this fountain in the Robles Gallery garden." So I took her there. [##]



So I saw her later, and I don't know whether it was here or in Fresno; I guess it was Fresno. So I had to meet some of the committee people, and I was just then going off to New York to have my exhibition with Martha Jackson (that was in '65). So she said, "Claire, you know, the only way to get a commission from these people is to do a model. It can be this big, it doesn't matter, but they cannot work from any drawing. They can't see what you're doing from photographs. They want a model for the site." So she and I went down to the mall, and there were several sites available, and we chose a site. It was a street which was a cross street; it wasn't on the main mall, but it was a cross street which went in out of the mall into the town. It was one block long, and it had three pools, three reflecting pools. And she said, "How would you like to take care of the whole block, do three things?" I said okay. I had my drawing pad, and we sat down on a bench, and I said, "It will be this way, one, two, three. There will be the Three Fires. There will be the Spreading Fire, the Leaping Fire, and the Smouldering Fire." And I made a little drawing. She said, "All right, Claire, now do a little model." So when I went off to New York, I took my torch with me, and I worked out in a field in New Jersey and did these three models. I shipped them then to Fresno, to Ella. And Ella took the models, which were about one inch to the foot, because I was going to





do a twenty-foot sculpture for the middle one, for the  
Leaping Fire . . .



TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

NOVEMBER 18, 1976

ROGERS: You were saying that you took the model, and it was one foot to the . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, I made them; I didn't take them, I made them. One inch to the foot. And when Ella and I sat on the bench in Fresno and I was doing these little drawings, I decided on the height and the scale and everything, looking at the thing. So I put them in a box and shipped them to her while I was having my show in New York. I did them out in the field in New Jersey. Martha Jackson knew somebody with a farm, and I went out there and got tanks and was working out in the field. So she got them and made photos of them and then made photos of the site. How she did this, it was really--I have the photo upstairs--it was really a very, very clever thing that she did, so that the little model stood in the actual photo, see. She did it just to scale, and here you could see it. She didn't present it to them, but she got all the material ready. Then when I came home after the show, I went to Fresno, and I had a meeting with the board of the jury. So they saw the photo, and they saw the models, and they said, "Okay, go ahead." So I did, I went ahead. And that was in '66. I started it. I'd already gotten my studio built by then, you see. I started working to



make a studio in '65, and by '66, I had a studio that I could work in. So that's the first big thing I did in the studio really, inside, because up to that time I'd worked outdoors. And it took me about eight months to do the three of them. Then, while I was there--that was in '66--and during the period I was working on these, I got the commission to do the church in '66. So in '66 I was being organized to go into this new big commission.

ROGERS: Well, your welcome back to America was beginning to look like it was going to be very profitable and that you were going to be happy here and able to earn a living. You must have felt pretty good about that.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you feel good, but then it's always a strange thing. I mean, you have periods when you have commissions; you have periods when you don't have commissions. In the meantime, I'm living off my work; so sometimes I'd have, you know, full times, and other times I'd have lean times, and it's been that way all the time.

ROGERS: You feel like you always have to prove yourself again?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, always. And I suppose in a way that's good, because it means you're growing. If it were just cut-and-dried and settled, you know, it would mean that everything was pretty static. But I'm moving all the time.

ROGERS: You said that you felt at the symposium you





wanted to reinforce the fountain that you had done on Wilshire because of all the controversy that had surrounded it. You have through the years repeated the Point as Sets, and yet are they repeated, or is each one different in a way?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I consider them like a fugue in music; it's a form with different expressions. The Point is a very simple thing: it's just a point. And the Set is a set of signs, again, which is the sign of the "U" which I use over and over. But the way I make the Sign, the way I use the Sign within that Point varies each time, so that it's always an exploration and always a discipline for me to do it. There is no possibility of a repetition, no possibility. And again, it's spontaneous. Every time I do it, I don't look at another one; I start fresh, and it's a different kind of result.

ROGERS: At the symposium, there were all types of sculptors there. Were most all of them contemporary. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, they were alive. Oh, you mean contemporary work? Yes.

ROGERS: Sculpture has been, through the ages, kind of synonymous with carving and modeling in some type of a biological form. Do you think that. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Through the ages in the Western civilization and maybe certain other civilizations, too, but there are other civilizations where you have articulated things. For



instance, British Columbia: there are certain carvings, but there are also sculptures which are put together with various materials used, like feathers and rocks and wood. All kinds of things are put together, I mean in other societies than our Western European society. You see, this is another thing that's happened, and it happened to me, of course, because I studied anthropology. It happened to me from the time I was a child--I mean, a young girl--when I was studying anthropology, and that was that I was awakened to the world. I wasn't just involved with Europe and America. This is a very important thing, and I think now it's very important, because the whole world--we are all interdependent now, not only in thought but also economically and politically and artistically.

ROGERS: If sculpture today is more nonfigurative, let's say, more abstract, is it still sculpture?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, sculpting probably means--to sculpt probably means forming, cutting away; probably it means to cut into, to sculpt. And so the word, like "necklace"--I mean a necklace is not what we think of as a necklace. So words get changed with usage and with experience. You have to realize what you want out of sculpture--what do you want out of sculpture? What do you need from sculpture?

ROGERS: Isn't what you do more constructing than sculpting?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see, this is what I'm saying. I'm not cutting away. To sculpt probably means to cut away;



I'd have to look in the dictionary, but I think it does mean to cut away. But why do you cut away? What do you do it for? That's the important thing. It's not just the technique. Who's interested just in technique? The means toward the end is not the end. I mean, the end is the meaning. So no matter how you arrive at the end, the only thing that you really are after is to project meaning, communication, emotion, feelings. So you'd have to make, you know, a description of what you want. You want it three-dimensional; when you think of sculpture, you think of a three-dimensional way of approaching some art or some art form (not two-dimensional, as in painting). Now, this is just general. And you can use any kind of material, any means. But the main thing is to have something to say that will give the viewer a notion of feelings and emotions of the artist.

ROGERS: I asked you earlier whether you thought that a piece takes on a life of its own. If when a viewer sees your piece, does he see a vitality in it, is he giving the soul of some kind of an indrawn life to this piece when he looks at it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, not unless the piece has it for him. You see, we talked about ambiguity, I think, didn't we once? Ambiguity is one of the important things about a work, because the viewer then can put himself into it. If it's too defined, if there's no ambiguity, there



isn't a chance for the observer. The observer has to be able to move in with his own, whatever he has within him, and take something from that work. And give something to that work. I mean, it's an interchange. And ambiguity is a very necessary part.

ROGERS: What can he give to it?

FALKENSTEIN: Himself, what he's got inside him. If he doesn't have anything inside him, he'll never get anything out of the work, I promise you. That's the reason people say, "I don't understand it." Well, the reason they don't understand it is because they haven't got anything in them to give to the work. I was just in Chicago, and I saw the big Picasso and the big Calder and the Chagall. I talked with a taxi driver, [laughter] and the taxi driver said, "I don't know what he's talking about; I don't know what he's . . ." As though he should know. He needs to be disciplined in that way of looking and feeling, just as he needs to be disciplined in music, in literature, or in anything else.

ROGERS: Well, what you say about non-Western art being as much sculpting or a piece of sculpture as Western art is--primitive man has no literacy about . . .

FALKENSTEIN: You don't think so? Primitive man's work is so involved with his rituals and with his religion and with his life that it's--well, it's part of his life.

ROGERS: Yes, but he's trained in it, and he understands





all of the symbols and the iconography of the piece that he sees. But the taxi driver doesn't have any exposure to that at all.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, okay. I mean, if he doesn't, it's because he's never been disciplined in viewing, whereas in the primitive man, they're all disciplined in their culture. See, this is a problem with our culture, is that it's very disparate. You have the completely uninitiated people, and they just aren't initiated at all in what their culture is.

ROGERS: In Jack Burham's book, Beyond Modern Sculpture, he says that the people in the materialistic capital countries have created artificial systems for themselves to work and live in that require them to only have things around them, objects around them, that make the system function. Like instead of buying art, they'll buy a car, because the car allows them to work in this system that they are born and operate in.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, that's one level. But that certainly isn't the level I live in, and I don't think it's the level you live in.

ROGERS: But that's because perhaps we're fighting against that kind of a system. We could be, and many people are, completely insulated from a more sensual natural environment by air-conditioned buildings and automobiles and activities that don't require us to go out and touch or



feel or hear. We can just stay home and turn on the television.

FALKENSTEIN: And yet they wouldn't have the television, and they wouldn't have what's on the television, without art forms. And they wouldn't have their car without art forms. That car is carefully designed, not only to function but to look beautiful. And also it's very expressive. The car is a very expressive form, and a beautiful form, often. And that took artistry to build it. No, I would say--those who participate and those who don't participate in the culture. . . . And it's sheer education.

ROGERS: You've mentioned several times about the acceptance of art being different in Europe than it is in the United States. Do you see that . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you don't have the vandalism, for instance. There I think the people believe that the art belongs to them. Here, the reason you have vandalism is because of alienation. They don't believe it belongs to them; therefore, they want to destroy it. Actually it does belong to the people. Frankly, whatever exists belongs to everybody, finally. It finally gets to public ownership--everything. I'm talking about art now. No, I think it's education. I think that we have in America vast pockets of illiteracy, of formal illiteracy--not only formal, I think all kinds of illiteracy. Maybe also in Europe, you have illiteracy, but you have cultural literacy.



You have cultural literacy, but maybe you have illiteracy in other ways. They don't go to school, many of them--I mean many of the workers--and yet they have this sense of belonging to their culture, which is marvelous. I told you about them singing opera, you know, and these were people who were just workers who I'm sure never went to school, or if they went--no, I don't think they ever went to school. Or maybe they went two or three years or something like that, because they were so poor.

ROGERS: How would you compare him with the taxicab driver in Chicago?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think they're about the same level. Except the taxicab driver hasn't had the possibility of an environment, of a cultural environment, that almost any European has. Because art is around them; it's enclosed--I mean, the environment is one of art. Not only in song, as in Italy, where everybody sings and you have the opera and it's easy to get to and everybody goes. And then the buildings and the sculpture, the outdoor sculpture--it's outdoors; it belongs to the public. And in Venice, you know, it's just a sculptured place, the whole thing, as an environment, marvelous. No, I think we in America--that's the reason probably we're doing the most alive work, is because we're making it; we're making our culture, whereas they--it's made. They've got it made.

ROGERS: Well, twice you mentioned that it was the young





people who objected to the avant-garde sculptures that you put up. Do you think that in that now you are contributing to this accumulation, shall we say, of art in America, that in fifty years there might be more acceptance, or a hundred years, more acceptance of these [works]?

FALKENSTEIN: It won't even take that long. I think we're going by leaps and bounds. And a lot of it is through communication and through the television. People love to look at television. My God, what you see on television is wonderful. Of course, there are some awful things, too, but I'm one for the benefits of television. You can't help but be influenced by some good things because there are so many good things on.

ROGERS: I'm afraid it's going to make a nation of spectators rather than a nation of doers, though.

FALKENSTEIN: No, I don't think so. You can't live and just be a spectator; you've got to do and support yourself. I mean, in order to support yourself, you've got to act. And there's no reason why we can't learn through vision, be visually literate instead of just reading. I mean, everybody's putting this great emphasis upon reading, but I think we can have a visual attitude as well.

ROGERS: The base or pedestal or platform always has been a barrier to a viewer in looking at sculpture. What role does the foundation of your pieces play? Often yours don't have any at all.



FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think you have to not be absolute about anything. I think sometimes you need a base and sometimes you don't. Sometimes a thing should float, just as that piece at USC floats, the Montage Section. And the other one is on a base. I think it just depends upon the piece and where it is. I don't like to make absolutes. Some bases are just as beautiful and just as worked out as the piece. Like Brancusi's bases are just as beautiful as his sculptures; the base is really a continuation of the work.

ROGERS: Have you ever stood and watched anybody look at your pieces?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the only time I've really been aware of it, I mean really strongly aware, was this summer when I was in Italy and we were photographing the gates at Peggy Guggenheim's. Of course, they're transparent; I mean, all the interstices, you know. And this alley--well, it's not an alley; it's a little street about four feet wide that goes this way and then that way, with very much traffic coming this way, coming around that way--and every single person (and I know that some of them go by a lot) always stops and looks and examines and looks at this piece. And mostly I think it's because it's just a shock to see this where it is, in a kind of secret, small little street. Suddenly they come upon this, and here are these jewels, you know, and here are these great big chunks of



glass being held in by the iron. And they study it and feel it, and then they go on. They call it the "Street of the Gate" now.

ROGERS: Do they?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: That almost gives you some perpetual type of insurance, doesn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you don't know how long your works are going to last. But I'm doing what I love to do. In fact, I'm doing the only thing I'm capable of doing; I'm not capable of doing anything else. And I love it. I live day by day, and that's all there is to it. I mean, I'm not greedy about the future; I'm just going right through and doing my work and enjoying it and that's it.

ROGERS: I think we'll stop now, and we'll pick it up.

DECEMBER 2, 1976

ROGERS: Every artist has pieces that he feels are seminal works, and you said you consider the Sundial that you did in 1969 for the St. Luke Church in Long Beach a seminal piece. Why do you say this?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it has within it the sense of topological structure in the finest possible fulfilled way. And by that I mean there is in it this continuity of surface in an inward-outward, expanding-ingoing--I mean, it goes both ways. And in sheet metal--it's copper sheet



metal. Also it was a success; it was a great success. The piece worked--it was a sundial. And not only did it go against the traditional attitude of a gnomon simply, just one gnomon (which is the diagonal which is directed towards a certain point in the heavens to cause the sun to cause the shadows upon a flat surface to give the time), but in this piece there was the integrity of the work as a sculpture. It was a piece of sculpture, because it told time on itself, and then it went beyond itself to the flat platform on which the piece was placed and told time on that platform, and then the shadow went beyond to the earth. So you had three points upon which the time could be read. But this piece has had a very interesting history, in that the parson of this Episcopal church couldn't understand it, and he didn't want it there. So the donor took it to her home, and it is now in Pasadena in a private garden. So there it rests. I see the donor once in a while, and they say, "Oh, our sundial is just working beautifully, and we love it in our garden," and so on. But it was too bad that this preacher was unable to understand why a sundial should be a sculpture and not just a traditional sundial that he could only understand.

ROGERS: Could you give a little more history of the commission? Were you specifically asked to do a sundial?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, no, I wasn't asked to do a sundial. I was asked to do something to remember the death of one





of the parishioners [Caroline Clock], to do something that would be there to remind people of this person. And I suggested a sundial. I said, "Well, instead of doing just a sculpture, as a symbolic sense of the passage of time, why not do a sundial?" And they all thought it was a very good idea. But I'm incapable of doing anything that's traditional and hackneyed; I did something that was creative, and they were unable to realize what it was about.

ROGERS: But didn't they see any models before they approved the installation?

FALKENSTEIN: They saw a model, but it was small. They were bowled over by the idea of using time as a symbol, and they just accepted it. But when it was enlarged to 4 feet x 5 feet x 4 feet, a big thing, and here it was a big sculpture, to them like a big abstraction (and evidently they had within them already some built-in antipathy towards abstract art), they couldn't see it for what it was, for what it did, but they only saw it as something foreign and alien to their understanding.

ROGERS: How long did it stay in the first installation?

FALKENSTEIN: One night. One day, one night, and then it was covered and taken out of there quickly.

ROGERS: What was your reaction to this?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was terrible; I mean, I just thought it was awful that this should happen. Because I was so



happy. I thought that I had achieved something that was very interesting and very successful. And suddenly to be rejected in this way, I just couldn't believe it. But it's in the garden, and it's aged--it's now oxidized and it's very beautiful and they love it.

ROGERS: At whose house?

FALKENSTEIN: It's John Sadler in Pasadena, a big beautiful home with a marvelous big lawn where this is out on the lawn. Sometime I want to go over and do some photographs of it. I've never had any photographs of the installation, and I'd like to get some. Maybe this is the best place for it anyhow, in a private setting.

ROGERS: Mr. Sadler paid for the sundial to be put in the church?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it wasn't he; it was his mother-in-law. [##]

ROGERS: Do you remember who he was, who the pastor was?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't remember. See, this was a long time ago, seven years ago. [Father Hall]

ROGERS: Did he have anyone with him that looked at it that first night and just . . .

FALKENSTEIN: No, I just looked at him, and I couldn't believe it. His face got so sour. [laughter] His mouth went down--ugh--and he looked at it. And I didn't know--I couldn't believe it. I was all tired out because I'd worked up to the last minute with the polish and getting it there--it was a big job in transporting the thing and



setting it up. I had a man who was an astronomer from the university at Long Beach assist me in putting the gnomon in just right, because wherever you place the piece, you have to adjust the gnomon to the North Star, and it has to be just right. Here was this astronomer and I working, and we were all tired out--and this pastor was looking at it with this very sour face. But I thought maybe that was just his regular expression. Never did I realize that he agonized over it: he just couldn't stand it.

ROGERS: Didn't the parishioners have any choice in the matter?

FALKENSTEIN: No. No one saw it. It was out of there; it was covered over. After he had seen it, they covered it over, and the next day it was moved. Where was it moved? Oh, I know. It was moved to her house, in Long Beach, the mother-in-law, whose name I've forgotten. [##]

ROGERS: So as a memorial to, who was it?

FALKENSTEIN: Her daughter.

ROGERS: And who was that?

FALKENSTEIN: The mother [Blanche Clock] commissioned it for the sister of Mrs. Sadler. So the whole thing went awry, you know.

ROGERS: You don't remember who it was to be in memory of?

FALKENSTEIN: The sister of Mrs. Sadler [Caroline Clock].

ROGERS: Oh. Did they ever replace it with anything else?

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know, I never followed it. I haven't





followed it. I have no idea. I mean it was kind of a thing I wouldn't be interested in following, would you?

ROGERS: Well, I was just curious to know whether or not the . . .

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see the thing is, in my life, I have gone through so many experiences--some very happy, some very frustrating--and when I am frustrated in a thing like this, I don't pursue it, I don't dwell on it, because I'm moving into something else. I forget what it was I moved into immediately after that, but I just washed this away. As a matter of fact, I think I did the sound piece of bronze, called the Bronze Bell, or Flora, which was called later Flora. This was a piece that was on a cam, and when you moved it, all the elements struck it, and you had the sound of the bronze being struck by the points. Is that there?

ROGERS: No, I don't have that listed. Where is that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't know whether there is a picture here of it, but the Bronze Bell was in--oh, no, maybe this was afterwards. CIS Galactic Transformation--that was afterwards. (That was earlier. Yeah.) But you see, now the CIS Galactic Transformation was following that and was very topological and with sheet metal. And that was for a big show at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, for art and technology. I think that was '69 also.

ROGERS: I don't have a date on it. Where is this piece now?



FALKENSTEIN: In storage. I'll bring that to my storage.

ROGERS: So along with the success . . . . [phone rings;  
tape recorder turned off]



TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 2, 1976

ROGERS: In regard to your being invited to the Brooklyn show of art and technology, how did that come about?

FALKENSTEIN: I'm trying to remember. I was invited, and I responded. And it's very interesting how in a way it correlates with my invitation to participate in the MIT show, which then came here to the Museum of Science and Industry. I responded. Now, maybe some other people were invited and they didn't respond, I don't know, but I was the only one from the West Coast in that show.

ROGERS: Then in 1970 you were very busy. You did the DNA Molecule for the Hyland Laboratory in Costa Mesa, and you also did another fountain in Long Beach, for the Long Beach Museum of Art [Structure and Flow, No. 3].

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it was installed at that time, but I'd done it previously. I had started that in '69 also and finished it around '71. And then it was given to the Long Beach museum and installed at the Long Beach museum in '72. From '69 to '72--so there were three years there.

ROGERS: You say it was given. Did you give it to them?

FALKENSTEIN: No, that fountain was commissioned by Dr. [Louis] Heyn for his home on Mulholland, up in the Hollywood Hills. He bought property in Mendocino and



was going to move away from this house--which was a marvelous house, by the way; it was a [Richard] Neutra house, one of the best, beautifully kept and all that. But it caused him such grief moneywise to keep it up, and he wasn't there that much (he's an acting psychiatrist and his practice was in Long Beach). So he decided to sell it, and he bought acreage in Mendocino. He thought, "Well, if I'm going to travel, I might as well really travel, get out of the area for the weekends and have some peace." But he didn't want to leave my fountain there, so he gave it to the Long Beach museum. And it was installed in '72.

ROGERS: The DNA Molecule that you made, did you do some research into DNA before you designed it?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I read the book--I'm trying to think of the name--[Francis] Crick and [James] Watson [The Double Helix]. Anyway, I read the book, and I went to UCLA, to the biology department, and did some research in the biology department, I think it was from Professor [Emil] Smith. And I also bought a film that was done on the DNA molecule, which I have still, and then began working. I did one model which was not acceptable, and then I did the second model which was acceptable. It turned out to be fifteen feet high and about five feet across and is a kinetic sculpture, a two-way action. The exterior and the interior act against each other,





moving to develop interstices which are in motion; and the whole thing, when it moves, the interior against the exterior, will bring about the double helix, which continues into space and seems to regenerate itself. That's the idea, that with the motion upward of this double helix, you have a forming of a new helix, a new double helix, as though a new self is generated. And that was put in out at Costa Mesa at the Hyland Lab. I haven't been out there to see how it's moving, or if it is moving, and what condition it's in. But I'm going to go out there someday and see how it's going, because I've heard that the Hyland Lab changed ownership, and I just hope they're taking care of it.

ROGERS: What is the source of the action?

FALKENSTEIN: The source of the action is the base, which is motorized.

ROGERS: Has to be turned on manually?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it isn't turned on manually there, but it has a switch in the interior of the building. It was to be the first of many sculptures in the court, but I don't think they went on--they never did another one. Mine was the first, and it was the only one, finally.

ROGERS: I haven't seen it, and I'm hoping that it's still moving.

FALKENSTEIN: I hope so, too.

ROGERS: It would distress me if you create such a piece



and then the motor isn't turned on every day. Wouldn't that upset you?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it upset me very much. I used to go out there, and I'd go into the office and say, "Look, it's not moving." Then everybody would get excited, and they'd call the maintenance people, and the maintenance people would come out and work on the motor. But this is the problem with these motorized pieces, and that's the reason I'm discouraged about motorizing things, is because of the problem of maintenance. People just don't take care of them, unless you have a very autocratic person in control who insists upon it and who wants to have the thing in motion.

ROGERS: This kind of falls under the same category as fountains that aren't turned on.

FALKENSTEIN: Same thing.

ROGERS: It seems it ought to be appropriate to have a covenant with people who assume ownership of these pieces, that they will exhibit them in the form that the artist originated them.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it would be good if the artist had that much power, but usually the artist is the beggar, and the owner is the one who demands and controls; and often he is talked into doing something that he probably wouldn't even want to do anyway, except somebody, like the architect or the designer, wants it. Finally, when



it gets just to be in the owner's ownership, he just is disinterested. It's a lack of education, a lack of feeling, a lack of sensibility. It takes sensibility and development to appreciate works, and there you are.

ROGERS: You have added the sheet metal now to your . . .

FALKENSTEIN: . . . vocabulary . . .

ROGERS: . . . vocabulary, but you are still continuing in exploring the Sign and the Points. As your work goes on, did you find that there was a feeling of expansion, or did you feel that you wanted just to do these things with the same thing that you were working with? In other words, were you satisfied at that point that the sheet metal and the tubing and the wire was all you needed for your expression?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you see you don't make up your mind about these things. It's a kind of integration of your total self, what you do and how you do it; what you use, how you use it. And often you learn, or you're taught, unconsciously often, by the things you do. Now sometimes you do something and it teaches you to go on to the next step. That is, it's not a mental or an intellectual kind of thing, but it's a kind of action between you and the materials, you and ideas, you and the universe, you and your life. And it's nothing that is dominated by thinking. Thinking comes in, certainly, but thinking is only part of it. Usually thinking comes afterwards, as a matter of



fact. When you begin to think, the thing is finished, pretty much. In fact, thinking--you think all the time, but when it's creative thinking, or creative thought, it isn't the same kind of rational thought that one usually thinks of as thought.

ROGERS: In dealing with an abstraction, it's always a question when the phrase, "It is finished," comes. Is this an intuitive thing with you?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, why do you say abstractions?

ROGERS: Abstraction as against something that's figurative and realistic, recognizable.

FALKENSTEIN: What's the difference? I don't see how you make the distinction.

ROGERS: I make the distinction between looking at a human form or a biological form that I know and I'm familiar with, as opposed to a form that doesn't relate to me in any context in relationship to those forms.

FALKENSTEIN: Look, a work of art has nothing to do with the human form or this or that. Maybe it's a point of departure, but it's no longer the human form--it's paint, it's canvas, it's metal, it's wood, it's something else. It has nothing to do--now, if you're thinking about copying something and then when you've copied it that's finished, well, that has nothing to do with art. You can make a mountain as big as a mountain, and what have you got? You've got an imitation of a mountain, and it has nothing





to do with art; it has nothing to do with reality. A work of art has to do with the human spirit expressing feelings, emotions, no matter whether he uses a representational means or whether it's a symbolic means. And finishing it, starting it, continuing it, has to do with creation and not with imitation. This is one of the first precepts of a work of art. You could use something as a point of departure, but you can't imitate it. This is the reason you have these sidewalk art shows, which are nothing--I mean, they're just nothing, they're just nil, they're just worse than nothing, because they mislead not only the person who does it, but mislead the observer, because they have nothing to do with art.

ROGERS: Well, I think that in Los Angeles in the fact that it's so wide and open and so many people feel that they have been inspired to become artists, there is a great variety of sidewalk art in the area, and . . .

FALKENSTEIN: And it's lousy.

ROGERS: . . . and tourists come to the city and say that we're a very "arty" city, because there is so much being shown.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. And you know the very same thing that you see on the sidewalk here, you'll see in the Grand Palais in Paris, and you'll see in Russia, or you'll see in--it's universal. It's just--I won't like to use the word, but it's just nothing; it's nothing. And it goes



on and on. And it's from the beginning of time. It has nothing to do with art. That isn't art. [laughter]

ROGERS: Well, is there another level of art in Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure. I mean, there are things going on here that are very exciting and very creative.

ROGERS: Would you like to be a little more specific?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you can see it in the galleries; you can see it in artists' studios; you can see it in the museum; you can see it in--well, there, that's it. But you don't see it in certain studios; you don't see it in certain galleries; you don't see it in certain museum shows. There has to come some kinds of standards and some kind of judgment. I mean, just because you look at a representation, it's not necessarily a work of art. And that's not only a representation of something that's recognizable, but it could be an abstraction, too--that's just as bad.

ROGERS: Before we go on further with that, I just wanted to complete my quest for when you know that you're all through with a piece and that you are satisfied with it.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, frankly, I think it's very difficult to know about the end of something. Sometimes you never want to finish and never can finish. But when you have made a statement that is communicative, that you feel it communicates itself, and you feel that if you go on with it you might weaken the statement--although you could go



on with it, you might weaken it--so that's where judgment comes in. And even though it may not look finished, in the finished sense of technique, it may be finished in that it's the strongest statement that you can make of this idea. It may not look finished: for instance, some of the great artists, like Toulouse-Lautrec. . . . If you look at some of Toulouse-Lautrec's pastels, and then you look at another pastel of some of these sidewalk people, they're very finished, and in fact they're finished to the point of deadly deftness. But to hang on to vitality and to hang on to the quality of rich integration of color and so on, you see--and again we come back to ambiguity. If you finish a thing to kill it--I mean, finish it to the point of killing it--there's no chance for ambiguity; there's no chance to move into it; there's no chance for the observer to add anything of himself. It's all said; it's all done.

ROGERS: Photorealists have been very active in the last few years in making things superrealistic--you see things that you wouldn't see with your own eyes.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, if you love that, it's up to you. You can love it; I don't like it. I'm against it. And I'm against a lot of--I think if you're going to have this kind of thing, all right, do it with a photograph, that's the medium for it. I don't like some of those things. Go into the Louvre and see some of the Empire



period. See how you like them, huge paintings with everything there. See how you like it. I don't like it as well as a small Rembrandt.

ROGERS: What about an artist like Edward Hopper?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, he's a good artist, but he's not to my mind a great artist again, as Rembrandt.

ROGERS: Who excites you in the contemporary artists in Los Angeles right now?

FALKENSTEIN: I would have to think about that. Because I don't like very . . . For instance, when I think in terms of art, I think internationally. I don't like to say whom do I like in Los Angeles, for God's sakes; I like to think in terms of whom do I like. And maybe some of them are dead whom I like. I like Giacometti, but he's dead. I like [Robert] Rauschenberg; he's alive. I like some of [Claes] Oldenburg, but not all--in fact, very few things, but I like some of them. I like Calder, and he just died. It's hard for me to pin myself down to something else other than something that really means--I like Morris Louis, but he's dead.

ROGERS: Do you have much contact with the art scene in Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, we've already talked about that, and I told you I didn't.

ROGERS: Well, it's very hard for me to feel that you just don't. You must know what's going on. You see it and





read it as you go along; you do go to gallery shows occasionally, even to your own. You see and hear . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I like very little that I see. I like some of the works that I see. I like some, but frankly I don't even--I'd have to . . . For instance, I went to Margo Leavin's Tuesday, and I saw an artist's work. It was a whole wall of small photos, which were treated--he treated them by working with the developing medium, when they were being developed, the Polaroid medium. And I liked that wall of things very much. Now, I don't know his name. I should have written his name down. You see, a lot of these people are just coming up, and they aren't names that you know. When I see something and I like it, I probably should write the name down so I can tell you. [laughter]

ROGERS: Well, I'm looking for an overview from you on the scene as you see it today.

FALKENSTEIN: I'm looking, but I only look in terms of a very broad spectrum. I don't look in minuscule--I don't look this way or that way--because I'm busy about my own work. I'm not out there studying other people's work.

[tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: In speaking about several pieces, the piece that you did for the reflecting pool in San Diego was a point of departure for you. Would you like to elaborate on that?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. To me, that was one of the breaks in



a history at least of ten--oh, how long can I say?--a fifteen-year history of structure which was built on copper tubing and the interstice. The idea [was] that you had within the structure this motion, moving inward, outward and over, so that a kind of intricate mesh was accomplished. Well, in the early forties, I did the wood pieces which opened up the volume and also were kinetic in that each piece had a different means of motion (one was sliding; one was rotating and so on, and I said earlier). That gave me the beginning of the idea of putting together a series, and the series then would become the whole. I mean, the unit was built upon several elements. So here in San Diego I combined that with a series, three pieces in connection with each other, and with the use of copper tubing and the mesh. But a new thing was added in that instead of having a very intricate, close-knitted structure, I opened up the interstice and had a lyrical expression of about, let's say, three lines intersecting, three tubes intersecting to create a large kind of interstice, using three elements in relation, agitating the water on the water level with underwater jets so that you had the rhythm of the pieces expressed with that underwater motion, and giving the accent by a Point at a certain place. And I called it A Point in Acceleration [actually Accelerating Point], meaning that here is the beginning, and then [there is] that motion, not only of the pieces themselves in



relation of one to the other, and the interstices, but also the water. And the whole thing was twenty feet long and sixteen feet wide and five feet high. This was done in '74, and really finished at the beginning of '75 because of difficulties we experienced in the structure of the building and putting in a whole new basin and the water system; and it took the museum about a year to complete it.

But after that, I did the Coos Bay piece [Sign of the Pacific], which was a fountain that was on the mall. Now, this was the second time I tried the large interstice, the idea of the Point being a center of interest and then using these tremendous open areas created by just a few of the tubes to bring about a kind of harmonic internal structure, but not very complicated--very, very simple.

Then the third time I tried it was for the fountain for a private garden in Los Angeles, for Dr. Heyn. He wanted a small sculpture for his garden. He lives in Westwood, which is a very densely populated place where the buildings are very closely arranged. So I did this fountain that is five feet high and about five feet wide--it could be put in a cube of 5 x 5 x 5. But this time instead of using--now, in the Coos Bay water system, there was no water within the structure, but the water was in the pool, arranged itself within the interstices and mounted to an apex, on its own, almost in a contrapuntal way. So you had the water and the sculpture acting



in counterpoint. Now, in the fountain of Dr. Heyn's place, I used two elements for water. One was a single line: I took water up to the tallest part of the fountain, and it followed down one line. I call it "The Living Curve" because when it follows this one curve all the way down, that tube becomes living; it's the only tube that has water on it, and it just makes that one line come alive. And at the bottom, when it arrives at the bottom, it drops, so you have the sound of the dropping water. And then, the other part, I had the Point, again activating a certain part; I pushed the water up through the tube, and you had a kind of a bubbling element. So you had these two things in opposition: one, this long moving line, and then the opposition of the bubbling point. I haven't gone further than that because I haven't had an opportunity to, but those three are now in a whole new category, using the tube in another way.

ROGERS: When you design a piece, what part does the site where it's going to be play?

FALKENSTEIN: How does it play a part?

ROGERS: Yes, how does it play a part? Do you go and look where it's going to be? Do you choose a spot, or does the architect say to you, "This is where it's going to be," and then you go and look at it and say, "Well, now, here's what I'm going to do here." How does the development of what's going to happen relate to where it's going to be?







FALKENSTEIN: Well, to me it's very important. Some people say, "It doesn't matter where my work goes. It doesn't matter because the work exists in its own right." But I feel it's very important how the work is related to its environment. And the site is the first thing that I consider. I usually go to the site, do photographs of the site to put it in my mind how the work will exist, especially if it's an out-of-town thing where I can't get back to just look at it. For instance, when I did the doors for the [Sam] Rubenstein home in Palm Springs, I went there and photographed the area even before the house went up. The owner and his wife went out and stood in the spot--"This is where our house is going to be"--and I photographed them on the spot. And it isn't only just a physical thing. It's the vibration. It has to do with feeling of the area and being familiar with it and becoming part of it, one with it. You know, to create something, you just don't do it in a vacuum. You have to do it in relation. There has to be an answering quality, not only to the material but to the place, to the people. There has to be this relationship going. Otherwise, you might as well do something in abstraction and just simply do it in your studio; then it has to do only with yourself. But when you're working with other people, you have to bring in communication. It doesn't mean that you compromise, because you're not compromising; you're simply communicating



with somebody else your own ideas, and communicating with the environment.

ROGERS: Well, how far do you consider the environment to be involved? To the horizon, to the house next door, to the edge of your property?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think a lot of it has to do with expression. What do you want to express? What do you want to say in relation to whatever you're going to do? Now, here's an example. I have this job offered me to do the reflecting pool at the San Diego Fine Arts Gallery. The pool was a 16-x-20-foot pool, about 12 inches deep. It was underneath a portico with two columns holding the ceiling up, which was not only really damaging to the space but difficult, let's say, to work with as a sculpture. But this pool was a separation between the garden and the terrace. It's the sculpture garden of that museum, the sculpture court of the museum, and the two are interrelated not only to the garden but also to the terrace--to relate itself, be something of itself, but also to be part of that whole area where all these other sculptures were. So one of the first things I thought of was, it can't be high because I don't want to block out the view from one side to the other. Now, if a person is standing in the terrace, they can look across and see the garden sculpture. And if they're in the garden, they can look across and see the terrace sculpture. So I made up my mind. I decided



when I first went there, "Okay, it shouldn't be any higher than five feet because then it will find its place in that area and be something but also will not blot out either one side or the other." That's the first thing. And then the next thing was, am I going to do something to be just a point of action in that pool, or am I going to use the whole space? Am I going to use 20 x 16 feet, the whole space, or am I simply going to make something in that pool in one spot, just a small thing that will act as an accent or a point of interest? So I had to think, and I thought, "No, I'm going to use the whole area, because I think the whole area then will become more of a unit with all the architectural environment." Also, I liked the idea of using the whole area because it was the most challenging thing to do. To use that whole area in relation to that total space meant that I would have to arrange my idea around those posts and really be concerned about, you know, both sides of the--in fact the total area, not only within but on that side, on this side, and then think of them as together. And that was when I got the idea of opening up and making these big interstices, because the whole idea was so big, it was so broad. So you see, it wasn't just to open up, to look through, but psychologically and philosophically, it was a big idea. So the spaces got big, you see? So that, I think, tells you a little bit what happens when you work with the environment.



ROGERS: Some of the sculptures of the past have had castings made, and they have limited editions, like Rodin. You see Rodins in small gardens, in big gardens, on shopping malls, and on university sculpture gardens. That doesn't seem to imply that he made a piece for a certain place; he just made a piece, period, and it could be used anywhere. Do you see that some of your pieces could be used anywhere?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I think certain ones could, like the Point. It could act as an activator, as a point in a place, and not have a special necessity. I think this is the way you think of these sculptures, you know, like the Balzac at the intersection of Montparnasse and Raspail in Paris. Here's this great sculpture by Rodin, Balzac, and he's standing there holding that corner down, that intersection down. It's beautiful, and it's marvelous, and the reason is that it acts as an accent on an axis almost, you see. But it wasn't a designed piece for a particular area; it's a free sculpture in a free place. It's a different idea. Picasso has a head down in the churchyard of St. Germain, the churchyard of the church of St. Germain, and it's beautiful. It's just there: a head sitting on a pillar. And it's a work of art in itself; you can go and look at it and so on, fine.

ROGERS: Are you happy with where UCLA put your Point as a Set [No. 25] in the entrance to the sculpture garden?







FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think they did as good a job as they could. [##] I am unique in my direct work. There's hardly a piece--I don't know of any piece in the garden that is made directly. They're all cast pieces; they're all worked out from some kind of replica idea. Mine is direct work.

ROGERS: David Smith's is not a cast work.

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, that's right, that's right; he's different. Yes, that's about the only one. [##]

I am very hard to place. When I went up to San Francisco and saw the show up there (it's called ["Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era"]), they had me in the Northern California section, in the 1958 section. Well, that piece was finished last year, and I'm living in Los Angeles; this piece was definitely conceived in Paris and really worked out in Los Angeles. But they have me in Northern California. I said to the director, to Henry Hopkins, "How come you have me here?" I said, "I don't think I particularly belong in this section, do you?" And he says, "Claire, we didn't know where to put you."

ROGERS: What piece did they have of yours in the show?

FALKENSTEIN: It's a Point. Point as a Set [No. 14], a big one, about four foot. And the thing is that we had this great conversation about my work, and that's the first time I think that he had any inkling of what I am about. They just don't know.

ROGERS: Now, what kind of a conversation did you have with him?



FALKENSTEIN: Well, he and I talked, and this was for the film that we're doing, this documentary film. And he was just terrific. I mean, when we began to talk, we had this great interchange; I really like him, and we had a marvelous interchange, and I think now he understands me more than he ever did before. But he said then he didn't know where to put it, except there.

ROGERS: Could you elaborate a little bit on the interchange that you had? (I know that it's going to be on the film, but perhaps you could just give us the gist of it.)

FALKENSTEIN: I'm trying to think what we talked about. I think what I did was to tell him the reasons I had in creating such a piece, how it came about through the attitude of the sign, how I felt about the sign, and how this related to nothing at all in the geometry of the ordinary work of what you see. You see so much work in geometry, especially now there's been a kind of revival of geometry. And I said this is topological, and it's built on the sign. It has to do with the Einsteinian theory of relativity. I begin in the center, and the thing moves not only outward, to expand with the idea--like the expanding universe, forever and ever--but also it has the motion through the sculpture (you have over the surface; you have down through the sculpture). So there is this sense of relativity within the work.



Anyway, I can't remember all I said, but this is the gist of it. He looked at me and was very interested, and for the first time, I guess, he realized that there was something here that he really now is very excited about.

ROGERS: Do you find that you have to do a lot of explaining about your work?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, I do. And I don't understand why, except I suppose a lot of the things that I have done have been so avant-garde at the time I've done them and then later have become so much in the stream of things. Now, again, I'm thinking about these wood pieces I did in the early forties. This could have been done tomorrow by a very young sculptor here in Venice, this piece right here on the table.

ROGERS: Just for the record, what is the name of that piece?

FALKENSTEIN: It's called Classic Piece, and it was shown in San Francisco around 1943. And it was done in '42. It got a prize--it had the first prize in the art association annual--and was written up in the bulletin at that time. But I never would have gotten it except that two very, very smart people were then active in San Francisco, Adaline Kent and her husband, Bob Howard. They were always kind of backing me and helping, I mean, recognizing me. I think probably it wouldn't even have gotten in the show if it hadn't been for them, but they were very alert.



She herself was a great sculptor, and he, too. They were both acting sculptors there in town. And they were leaders. But they always were interested in what I was doing. That is one time in my life where I had two sculptors who were so sympathetic with me and really, you know, related to what my inner purpose was. That's the first time in my life. Let's say it's practically the only time, that time in San Francisco, the early forties. And since then it's usually been antagonism. [laughter]

ROGERS: You haven't found anybody that has been . . .

FALKENSTEIN: I'm not talking about anybody, I'm talking about sculptors, fellow sculptors.

ROGERS: And you have not felt that reception here in Los Angeles?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, no, not at all.

ROGERS: Well, you haven't been exposed to much of the art world here in Los Angeles either, have you?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't know anyone who's had more exposure. I've done more outdoor work, I've done more public work, I've done . . .

ROGERS: No, I don't mean exposure as far as what you've presented; I'm talking about feedback to what you've done.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's hard to get feedback. Everybody is very competitive and very actively working for themselves. It's hard to get feedback from anybody, really.

ROGERS: Would you say that Los Angeles is very egocentric





in the art community?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't know what that means, egocentric-- what does that mean? Tell me what you mean by that.

ROGERS: That artists are only interested in what they are doing and not how they fit into the art world as a whole, working as a union of artists to gain more reception, let's say, more publicity, more legislation, more money for the art community. Aren't there movements in Los Angeles that are becoming quite political?

FALKENSTEIN: Oh, I think there are. I mean, I don't think that Los Angeles is lagging behind in political action. I think there's probably more political action here almost than anywhere. But there's something to do with camaraderie that's very difficult to find. I think there are groups of artists that have camaraderie, but on the whole each one is out for himself.

ROGERS: Do you feel that you could join in a movement that would encourage the government, let's say the California Council for the Arts, to be more receptive and give more money for avant-garde work?

FALKENSTEIN: I hate to do that because when you begin to talk about avant-garde, who's going to say what the avant-garde is? I mean, when you begin to make judgments, it's very, very difficult, because whoever says "This is avant-garde," or, "That is avant-garde"--it's really dangerous when judgment comes in. You know, frankly, I don't know



what the answer is to help the artists, because as soon as you begin to, let's say, build a situation where he can supposedly flourish, usually he doesn't.

ROGERS: Why?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think because there has to be that individual freedom and the individual action in order to create. If you begin to curtail that, you'll lose the freedom of creativity. It's really something to consider. You want to help the artist, but you have to be so careful because as soon as you begin to help him too much, then you begin to control him. And when you begin to control, you lose it. I'm talking about outside control.

ROGERS: Well, there's been new legislation passed last year where an artist is to receive a royalty every time a piece of work exchanges owners.

FALKENSTEIN: It didn't pass; it was presented but it has not passed.

ROGERS: What is your opinion in it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I would have to study it, because the problem is bureaucracy, what will happen with keeping track of that 5 percent, keeping track of the sales, keeping track of the work? I don't know.

ROGERS: You don't think it's workable?

FALKENSTEIN: How do I know? I'd have to study it more. But it seems to me that as soon as that 5 percent presents itself, that means you've got to keep track of the work, you have to have a whole system of . . .



TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE\*

DECEMBER 18, 1976

ROGERS: Your role as an educator in art was a very prominent part of your early experiences in San Francisco, and then as you became an active working artist, that faded into the background. When did you pick it up again?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I started out--if you want to know the history of my teaching--as a teacher in the private girls'-school where I had graduated four years before. When I had graduated from the University, I went back there and taught. That was the Anna Head School, and that was in Berkeley. I taught there for seven years, and it was--well, it was the lower school and the high school. That meant I had students from five through eighteen. It started out as art and English for the lower school, and then finally it was art entirely. Well, after seven years I went to the University of California and taught in the extension over in San Francisco, and that was with adults. Then I went to Mills College and taught at Mills College; that lasted for two years, and that was in the middle forties.

Then I left Mills College and went to the [California] School of Fine Arts (which now is called the San Francisco Art Institute), and I was there for two years. I was there,

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\*Tape VIII, Side Two was not recorded.



by the way, at the most crucial time of that school, when artists were developed and great artists were there teaching. I mean, my colleagues were Clyfford Still, Diebenkorn, Hassel Smith--oh, many that I can't say right now, but they come to my mind. Of course, Clyfford Still to my mind is one of the greatest painters in the world today. [##] Anyway, I was there from '48 to 1950. I don't know why, but in 1950 everybody--the whole school broke up as far as it . . . By the way, Douglas MacAgy was the director, and he proved to be extraordinary in his perception and his development of ideas for creative--what would you say?--just to get people into this creative response, the students and the teachers. So he left; Diebenkorn left; Clyfford Still left; Hassel Smith left; I left. I went to Paris. Then a lot of the students, who are now well-known artists. . . . For instance, Frank Lobdell was a student; he was working there under the GI Bill. In fact, between the students and the teachers, there wasn't much difference in age, because the students were there on the GI Bill, and they were veterans, you know. I mean, they were older people. They weren't like students; they were experienced human beings who came to the arts as a kind of release and a delayed schooling. I remember two especially, and they were Frank Lobdell and Walt Kulhman. Oh, there are lots of them whom I can't remember. I taught sculpture, and some of my students are around.





One is over at the Palace of the Legion of Honor--what is his name? I forget--anyway, he's very active in the Achenbach [Foundation for Graphic Arts] collection as curator. I'll think of his name. [Fenton Kastner]

Well, so then I went to Paris and was there for about thirteen years; there was no teaching at all. But I was invited in the interim, after I was there for eight years, to teach at the California School of Fine Arts again. I had to return to America anyhow because I was invited to speak at the International Design Conference at Aspen. So it happened that everything came together, and the head of the school, who was Gurdon Woods at that time, in 1958, invited me to come and teach in the summer. See, the design conference at Aspen was in the summer, and he said, "When you finish that just come on over and do a summer session with us." So I did. I went to San Francisco and I did the summer session, and I was there a year. In fact, when I came back, I thought, "Maybe I can arrange my life so that I can stay in America, instead of going back to Paris." Because I had felt about that time, after eight years, that I had succeeded in doing what I wanted to do in Europe. But I found--well, anyway, so then I came there, I taught, and during that period I had this exhibition at the museum and an exhibition at Bolles Gallery and was invited by the museum to lead a tour through France for the museum. By the way, that's



the first overseas tour ever done by a museum. And I led that through France. So that took me back to Europe. In the meantime, anyway, I had been there a year, and I found that I could not earn my living in San Francisco as an artist. So I went back to Paris where I was under contract with Galerie Stadler, and I knew that I could earn my living there. The contract with the gallery was very economical; I mean, I had to live economically because the contract wasn't that high. But, anyway, I was living as an artist and working as an artist and not doing something else. So I went back to Europe, and when all the people came over from America for that tour, I was invited to come back here to do a commission. See, that happened in 1959, and so they invited me to come back (that was '60), which I did, and do a commission. Then I went to New York--in fact, I went to New York in '59, after I left San Francisco and before I went on over to lead the tour, and established a studio in New York, found a gallery [Gallery Mayer] and had a show. And then I went to Paris to meet all these people. So in 1960, then, when I came back, instead of going back to Paris immediately, I went to New York and had another show in a gallery there. But while I was there in '59, I had arranged to have a show in Paris and Rome and in New York in 1960. So my life was still in Europe. So when I had all those shows--of course, I've gone through this before--through this one tour I was invited to do



the second tour through Italy, and through that tour I received the commission to do the Guggenheim gates, which took me back to Europe anyway. I had to do those gates in '61.

So in '62 I came back to America definitively, and I decided to really try to find my way here. I had the promise of two commissions and an exhibition. I didn't know what was ahead of me, I just came here with two suitcases and practically no money at all, but with these two commissions promised me and an exhibition. So in '63 I received a big commission, which established me in California, and that was the big fountain on Wilshire Boulevard. So then I bought property, because I had to have a place to build it, and that pretty much set me down here. I went back to Europe at the end of '63 to get glass for the fountain. And then I didn't return to Europe again for quite a few years because of the activity I had here, just one commission after another. I was pretty well established.

So I was working, and there was no thought of teaching or anything like that until I was invited to teach in '72, in two places. I was invited to give a master class at UCLA and to do a summer session of--what was it? four months, or two months, I forget--anyway, it was a full summer session at Utah State University at Logan. So I did my master class first--that was in the spring--and



then when the summer came I went to Utah and did that class. I hadn't taught for a long time, but I'd done a lot of work and a lot of thinking, and in both cases it was very interesting.

For instance, here at UCLA, I had adults, many adults, who had very little experience with art but had always had this desire to go into it. And the response was fantastic. They all wrote letters to the head of the department, Bob Haas, and told how they appreciated having me and so on. Well, on the basis of all this appreciation--that was where the award came, because all the people there said, you know, "My God, this is the first time I'd gotten into it, and the first time I realized something about it." So I was given an award [Remarkable Teaching Excellence] in the humanities department as an extraordinary teacher.

Well, then I went to Utah, and it was in the hot, hot summer. And Logan--I don't know whether you know it, but sometimes it can be, well, I don't know how hot, but it's just beyond belief. So I thought, "Well, how am I going to keep the attention of the students, or anybody, or myself, because of the heat?" It was just beyond words. So I thought it might be interesting for that length of time, for that period, instead of having people just being on their own, and not being directed--I didn't want to direct them too much--but something that would keep them occupied so that they would forget the heat and also







forget themselves and really work. So I got the idea of doing a group project, and I called it the Motion Wall. We did a wall which was to be automated, and each student--there were about fifteen or twenty students, I forget--each student decided on what kind of motion he or she wanted to express. Then we had an engineer, and several people helped us. And they helped each other with techniques; those who knew how to weld would teach the other students how to weld, and if they could saw, they'd teach. The girls were working just like the boys, and the boys and the girls were working together. We had the deadline, of course, because we wanted the wall to go up in the museum at the end as a piece, as a unit, as a museum piece. Well, it worked out just fine because they got enthusiastic and they worked night and day on that wall. Each one had his own kind of motion. I remember one student had the motion of twitch; another one had moving in and out and opening as it moves in and out, like a spiraling; another one wanted an acceleration of motion; another one had a pendulum; and another one--I mean, the whole thing was this group action of motion. Well, we finished it, and then we had to come together again in group action. (I'm not saying this is the only way to teach, but it turned out to be very good because of the difficulties of the lack of concentration because of this uncomfortable weather.) Afterwards we all had to come together on design, how we'd bring the thing together.



We had our motions, but how would we put them together so it would interreact and react with each other? So we had to then work it out and do it democratically and decide. Everybody had to not just have himself make the decision, but it had to be a group decision. If you don't think that was one of the most interesting things about it, the fact that they were acting as a group and doing a group decision--very interesting. So then after placing it and getting it working together--all the motions working together--then the idea was color. We had to introduce color, because it was to act as a work of art on a wall, like a mural, like a mural in motion. So different ones made designs and then the group decided which one they liked the best, voted--they all voted--and then they all had to work on it together after voting. And the last night before it was to be shown, I think they worked till midnight on it. And then it was put up. And I believe it's still up. I don't know if it's still working, but . . .

ROGERS: Was it powered by electricity?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, it was all motorized.

ROGERS: And what media did you use in it, wood and metal. . . ?

FALKENSTEIN: Everything, everything. One student used mirrors; what he wanted was a rectangle in oscillation or in motion that would be pulsation, I guess, like this, and he had to figure out how to do it. He did. We used



everything. Two students went to a junkyard and found an old typewriter and they automated it. No, the whole thing was so interesting, and I learned a lot. And interestingly enough, the head of the sculpture department, who got me there in the beginning--his name is Larry Elsner--came to every single period that I gave. See, I gave lectures intermittently with the work, because I had slides; so I gave slide lectures, and he came to every one. Then when it came time to do the wall, he, too, was part of it and came in with his kind of motion that he worked on, just like one of the students. So when I left, he said, "Claire, you're the best one we've ever had in the summer session." They invited me again, but I mean it's just too much of a hassle. I might someday go back again, you know, if it works out, but you have to almost be able to afford a thing like that. They don't give you that much money, and I have all my bills, and I'm not doing my own work, you see. So it's kind of a thing of doing it for your own, how you can develop through it. I mean, it has to be not just giving out; it has to come back, too. I mean, you just can't be altruistic about a thing like that.

ROGERS: What were the contents of your lectures? How did you break it down?

FALKENSTEIN: You know, it's very funny. Esther Fuller called me the other day and said, "Claire, you know I remember that series of lectures you gave"--this was at





the San Francisco museum--"and I've never forgotten it. You introduced me to a whole attitude towards art that I never understood existed, and that is . . . [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] . . . that is the fact that the content of society enters into notions which are expressed not only intellectually but through emotions and feeling." Of course, this is the realm of art, to bring together all of these realms which keep us healthy and whole as human beings. I mean, it's not just a matter of rules and regulations and ideas, but it's also how all of these parts of our lives in a social way are interrelated and expressed through images and signs and symbols. And this of course is the realm of art. The real artist is involved in the discovery and the expression of the notions. Sometimes the discovery is in the work, and he's unconscious, or she's unconscious, really of a discovery but simply is expressing the feelings and ideas that come through living at a particular time. And the difference between a real artist and a decorator or, let's say, a plagiarist, is that one has the vitality of discovery and the other is just simply repeating a superficial aspect which has no vitality. Of course, this is the thing that the critics have to go through and describe and talk about. But as time goes on, anyhow, all of the false work fades away and just dies because it has no need for being: "Anyway, she was not much of an artist but she was working and





obviously imitating styles and superficial aspects of the current work, but without any understanding of how or what or why certain forms would come into being." And in these lectures at the museum I was trying to put forth some of the notions that regulate our everyday living. I was bringing forward the idea of relativity as opposed to absolutism and showing how in relativity you could no longer work with the horizon line and the focal point as they did in the Renaissance with perspective, because we live in an entirely different world with another attitude towards nature and towards living. That doesn't mean that there weren't great works of art done at the time of the Renaissance, but under their own notions, not under other notions. And we can't copy superficial aspects of the Renaissance and expect to make a work of art. That is what I tried to bring out. And I had slides that showed the relationship of how in our present attitude towards nature and towards the whole content of living, how in this we would come forward with another form, we'd have our means of expression; our materials, our ideas would change with the changing notions, through science, through technology, through--how this affects emotions and how the world in its continuing readjustment to the new attitudes, how it's affected, how our environment changes.

ROGERS: These slides and what you're speaking of now are not what you gave at San Francisco but what you gave up



in Logan. Is that right? Or were they both continuations of each other?

FALKENSTEIN: No, no, I'm telling you that from the beginning of my creative life, this is it. The only change that has come through the years has been more of a clarification and an elaboration; but basically it's the same message. It's a simple message but a very strong one, and a very sane one to my mind. Anyway, I wouldn't be saying it if I didn't think so.

ROGERS: Well, an artist is affected by his changing times and science and technology, but he's also affected by the government that he lives under. Did you find that some of your students wanted to make political statements?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, but you see, politics and economics and all that follows everything. I mean, the reason that we have different politics and different--is because of the forces, the forces at work in society. And these forces are brought about by new notions. I mean, we can't think in terms of a De Medici politically because we don't live at the time of the Renaissance with the kind of notions they had. I'm just saying that basically it all comes from this whole continuing change in attitude towards the world--and that means economics and politics and everything as well as art. It all relates to that. Of course, you have different dimensions. I mean, the political dimension may give you some emphasis; some



people may want to emphasize one thing or another that they want to talk about. But I'm talking about form and structure and basic ways of expression. [##]

ROGERS: Although you didn't go back to your summer session, the effort that you put into it was a rewarding one. Out of that Motion Wall, did you have a germ of an idea to do something else? Does it always--like you say, one thing leads to another?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, you know, I felt this wall was so exciting and fulfilling that I would like to make it into some kind of book or pamphlet or treatise. So I made a photographic record and did interviews with the students, and I have that all, but I haven't done anything about it. And the main reason is because since then it's been one struggle in work that has not allowed me to take time off to do a thing like that (because it would take a lot of time to do it). If I could find somebody to collaborate with me on it, I'd do it. Would you like to collaborate with me on that? I've got all the material.

ROGERS: I'd be delighted. Was that your last foray into teaching?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes.

ROGERS: Have you been approached since then and turned it down?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I have been approached; I don't remember how and where, but from time to time. I think



at [California State University,] Fullerton they said, "Would you like to do it?" But it didn't come to me at a time when I was really ready to. . . . As I told you, it's a sacrifice to go into this because I have so much work to do for survival. I mean, if time is so organized so that it isn't giving all of your time to it, like I had to give all my time to it for--what was it?--two months. . . . That takes time out of my work. Now if I had a job where I could lecture or do some kind of work with students once a week or something like that, even twice a week, for two hours, let's say, I could do that. But I can't give all my time because I just can't afford to. I have to work; I have to earn my living.

ROGERS: What about taking on apprentices?

FALKENSTEIN: No, I've done that. I had two apprentices. I had one really important apprentice for two years [John Adams]. [##]

ROGERS: The master-apprentice relationship isn't the same as it used to be in the days of the guild then, is it?

FALKENSTEIN: Well . . .

ROGERS: Where techniques and inspiration are passed on in an individual basis.

FALKENSTEIN: I think we live in too commercial a time. [##]

ROGERS: Well, how does a young student support himself?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I surely don't think that when you go





to art school and you take a teacher's idea, an exercise that a teacher gives you, you get all the criticism and then go and sell it--I don't think that's a particular way to earn your living. It would be better for him to go out and drive a taxi or I don't know what, dig ditches. But this is to me plagiarism and outright theft.

ROGERS: In viewing the whole area of Southern California and the educational institutions and the opportunities for an art student to improve his techniques as well as his creativity, how do you perceive it? How would you evaluate the educational picture?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I find that in Southern California--I don't know too much about it, because as you know I've only had this one experience teaching. And that was absolutely fulfilling and satisfying, was just marvelous, because there was no sense of commercialism at all in the master class. These people who came in were learning for the love of learning. How they would turn it to their own needs would certainly come later and after a period of soul searching and self-development--I mean, that's the way it should be. And you see, this master class was only--how long? six weeks, or three weeks. I forget, but it wasn't very long; it wasn't much more than a month. It was opening their eyes to the world they lived in and helping them to gain some kind of technique to express themselves. That to me is the idea of teaching.



It's not just simply to take an exercise which is a direction to open things up for you, but taking it literally and doing something very superficially and then selling it to a store for a window, because that's a very superficial attitude.

Now, I have the acquaintance with two of the teachers who taught here a lot--that's Lee Mullican and Emerson Woelffer--and I've talked to both of them, and they speak about some of their students--well, this happened quite a few years ago--how these young artists were going into the Ferus Gallery and so on. . . . They were exploring their master credential. What they would do for a master's degree, they turned it right on into the gallery; they got right on into the art stream with their master's degree. Now, I don't know how they spoke about whether they liked it or they didn't like it, but that was a statement to me. And if that's so, that's very good. I mean, I think that's very good, because it meant that with the teaching they'd had, when it came to the time when they had their master's they had the kind of professionalism that would allow them to move into the art world, into an art gallery. See, that's an entirely different attitude than taking an exercise and just moving into a store with it, you know. And anyway, they were graduating; they had come through something. It wasn't just six exercises in a summer session, you know; they had gone through a whole



curriculum and come out as artists.

I think the teaching here--at Irvine, for instance, I heard that the teaching was very good. I don't know about UCLA; I have no idea. And USC. Now, for instance, at USC--see, I don't like to think only in terms of painting and sculpture either--I know that USC has one of the finest film departments in America. They do a lot of work in film. To me film is one of the most avant-garde graphic media, and to find that at USC they've had this emphasis I think is quite exciting, and we have that department here in this area. I think that on the whole the colleges here, I mean all of the colleges and all of the universities, are very advanced and very avant-garde in their treatment of exhibitions and allowing--they bring in professional artists to show at the colleges. See, I'm involved in two shows right now. One [Grossmont College], they just called me for prints, and the other one is for San Jose State [California State University, San Jose]. There are going to be two sculptors invited. I'm one; [Frederick J.] Eversley is another. With each of us we have to show one piece with all the documentation involved, and I'm showing that piece that's on the table. I told you about that.

ROGERS: Yes. Just for the record, has it got a name? Can you describe it a little bit?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I'll describe it. It's a stainless



steel sculpture in sheet metal. Topologically it's cut with one cut. It's brought into a three-dimensional form. There are three elements, that is, three sections. Each is on a moving bearing and placed on a base which is geared, so that with the motion of the total base you have a gearing down of the turn so that each piece is moving in relation to the other. And finally you'll have a completely different position established. It takes time; it takes quite a few times around before it happens. I mean it's always happening, but so slowly that you hardly know that the total is changing its full position. And my idea of this is, it was conceived as a fifteen-foot brilliantly reflective sculpture, because it was to be placed in a grove of eucalyptus trees which would be reflected upon the surface, and it (the sculpture) would seem to disappear, only appear and disappear as it moved, so that the eucalyptus trees would enter into it and the whole thing would be one of an excitement of interchange of reflection and actuality.

ROGERS: Where was this going to be?

FALKENSTEIN: At Fullerton, in front of the library, in this grove there. But I was one of, I don't know, about four people, and each one of us was paid to have a concept and do a model. The one they finally chose was a cast piece, a very small piece compared to this. But I have a feeling that one of the reasons was the sense that





it was a very public place and they didn't know about this as a safe piece for children to be around because of the edges, something like that. I mean, that was, I think, a consideration, because the one they chose was rounded and a mass volume.

ROGERS: When you present a piece in competition with other artists, do you ever get any feedback on why one was chosen and the other wasn't?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, always. It hasn't happened to me very often. You see, usually . . . I hardly ever do this; in fact, I don't like to, because I like to have people know what I do and come to me for a job and I do the job. And that's what usually happens. But once in a while I'll be in on competitions like this, and usually . . . I mean, the two times that I--I have been chosen several times, but I've been also not chosen several times. For instance, one time I was asked to have a concept for the stairwell in the library at the University of San Diego. And my concept was a unit. In fact, that piece on the ceiling was the unit, but it would go up fifty feet. I forget, I think there were thirty-two units which would be interrelated, and they would go up in a meander on this wall. Well, the one that was chosen . . . And also I used color. And the reason I liked my idea was that it was very safe: there wasn't any possibility of students jumping on it or hurting it or being hurt by it.



And the whole building was a cast concrete, very cold, and I thought that that needed color. So I used lots of color on this, on this metal. I'll show you the piece when we go over to my storage. Well, the one they chose was a pole which hung down in the center with three spun aluminum discs, automated on the roof so that it would turn in this space, just three discs. So to the person who projected me as the one to do it, I said, "Why did they choose it?" They said, "Well, they liked it because it was in motion." But I thought to myself, "Well, it won't be in motion, because actually to maintain a motorized piece will take a lot of money and a lot of time, and they'll have to go out and . . . and they won't do it. It will just hang there finally." I just know it. But I have to find out about that, how it has been maintained.

ROGERS: Have you ever done any automation inside motivated by wind on the outside?

FALKENSTEIN: No. You see, that's what I thought this would be, motivated by the wind. I wanted the gears to be so delicately balanced so that it would just move with the wind--that's what I wanted. But I did do a motorized piece for the outside, and that's for Costa Mesa, the Hyland Lab. That was the DNA Molecule, where I had the double motion of the center moving against the outside, so that there was the double helix which seemed to evolve and go up into space. That was the idea of the



rebirth of the new molecule; I mean, the double helix was restating itself through motion--seeming to--and that was the idea of the sculpture.

ROGERS: The dependence on the human equation to put a plug in a wall in order for a piece of sculpture to be complete, to be an entity in itself and do what it's supposed to do, seems to be a very large missing link in a work of art like this. If it isn't moving, there's something missing.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, there could be or there couldn't be, if the forms are strong enough. For instance, I don't mind that piece not to move; I like it just like that, in any position.

ROGERS: This is the one that you did for San Jose.

FALKENSTEIN: For San Jose, yes. It doesn't have to move, but it could move. I think ideally--ideally--when you do a motion piece, it should hold its own when it's quiet also. I was just in Chicago, you know, and I saw the Calder, the indoor Calder, which is motorized; and although it's much, much more exciting when it's going, still, actually, when you just see it as a composition without its motion, it's interesting, too. But his forms are so simple. I mean, a spiral, you know, wire and a spiral and then a pole with some fins. There were three elements--I forget what the other element was--and it was rather boring because the forms were so simple.



But in motion they became exciting. But his outdoor piece, without motion at all, just a great big marvelous sprawling form, didn't need anything--I mean, it was just something strong in itself.

ROGERS: I'd like to get back to the discussion of the educational picture in Los Angeles for just a moment and ask you about the California Institute for the Arts and Chouinard.

FALKENSTEIN: I don't know anything about them. I don't know a thing about them. You tell me.

ROGERS: Well, the discussion that I would hope to have with you would be in regard to your response to what kind of a job they're doing; so if you haven't any contact with them, why, we'll just go on to something else.

FALKENSTEIN: They've never questioned me or asked me for any kind of collaboration or anything. [##]

ROGERS: Do you think there's more emphasis on commercial art in Los Angeles than there is on fine art?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I think through the pop art era, which we are just coming out of or just consolidated in--I don't know what you want to say--that would be the case, because I consider pop art basically rooted in commercial art.

Most of those people were commercial artists, like [Andy] Warhol and, you know, they were all commercial artists. That's the reason they brought to art a lot of the commercial techniques. I'm not saying that's bad; I think





it's pretty exciting to bring new techniques which are in use in everyday living, I really do. I'm thinking of Moholy-Nagy and his [American] School of Design in Chicago, see, and I have some knowledge of that because I knew him. You see, all of those commercial techniques were valid to bring about a kind of rich creativity which was of our time and only our time because they, these techniques, didn't exist before. So it is very valid, the whole use of commercial techniques. It just depends on what you do with them.

ROGERS: Who would you say that's working now in Los Angeles would fall into that category?

FALKENSTEIN: I'm trying to think of the one--[Ed] Ruscha, for instance, is a very good example. He is obviously working with all the commercial techniques and is very well received; I mean, people like him.



TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE TWO [video session]\*

JANUARY 22, 1977

ROGERS: Claire, it occurs to me as we stand here in your garden that you have the best of all possible worlds here, surrounded by your works, the Pacific Ocean crashing out in front of your house, the birds singing, in a space that you created for yourself. What did you have in mind when you first started here?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I came to Los Angeles with two suitcases and not knowing whether I would go back to Paris. But I received the commission to do the Wilshire Fountain [Structure and Flow, No. 2], and I had to have a place to do it. So I looked around. One of the first considerations was good air, so when I heard of this place on the beach--one lot with access to the back from the Speedway and access to the front from the beach, with two old houses on it--I figured that, well, I could start with the land and redo it. So I tore down one house immediately, lived in the old house, and did the fountain in the back. And then later on I tore down the front and did the house. In the meantime, the house was much smaller than the old house, so I had space for a garden.

ROGERS: In this garden, there is a very good representation of the work that you've done through the years, isn't there?

FALKENSTEIN: Not through the years--I mean, through a

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\* TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE has been sealed at the request of the interviewee.



certain number of years. For instance, there are two sculptures from San Francisco [Sun No. 14; Sun No. 16], from 1958. The fountain [no title] was done around 1963.

ROGERS: That was the piece that we saw when the first film started.

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. And this is one of the pieces I did in relation to a commission for the Hyland Laboratories at Costa Mesa [DNA Molecule]. This is a module from St. Basil Church down on Wilshire Boulevard. And then I have a sheet metal piece [no title] over here done about 1969; since then, sheet metal has become important to me. Up to that time I'd worked mostly in linear elements--well, not entirely, but for quite a few years.

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ROGERS: We had an opportunity last Wednesday to film a very big important event for you Claire, didn't we?

FALKENSTEIN: Considering that this fountain [Structure and Flow, No. 2] has probably been the biggest sculpture and one of the most important pieces of my life, and considering that it has not been turned on for six years, I would say that it was very important. To me, it has the qualities basic to the most important part of my work, and that is, it has a topological form, the use of the sign. The quality of unity between the structure and the water was one of the things that I wanted to do



in the idea of unity, not to have the water separate from the form, but the two combined. When I finished it, I was so exhilarated and happy about the result, and to find myself in the midst of controversy was really very astonishing. But I think after having done it--it was installed in '65, and it's taken this length of time, I think, for it to find its place in relation to Los Angeles and have its qualities appreciated. I worked on that for two years, and, as I say, I felt that I had really achieved one of the most important pieces of my life. Art Seidenbaum wrote in the Times--at the time this was put in, he wrote about it; and then later, when I did the commission for the Roman Catholic Church for St. Basil, which is farther down on Wilshire, he wrote again and he called me "the woman who has welded Wilshire."

And this is the top of the narthex which faces Wilshire, the large window. It's 80 feet x 17 feet x 4 feet. As you notice, it's a three-dimensional structure; it relates to my never-ending screen, which, let's say, I developed in Paris around 1957. And although this has a very rigid quality, and most of my work up to that time was more lyrical, it was because I adjusted myself to corten steel. This is a combination of corten steel angles and stained glass. As you see, the whole thing is based upon a sign again, the sign of a triangle, which is symbolic of the trinity, and it is combining in a





three-dimensional way my never-ending screen. As you notice there, the gates have opened; those doors were also done by me, and they are definitely a lyrical use of the never-ending screen. I gave it that title, that development of my work, because it has that sense of extension.

Here is the topological structure installed at the performance theater, the Bing Theater at the USC campus. And this is sheet metal. And as I have said before, I'm coming more and more to using sheet metal. It's definitely in the sense of topology. There is this continuum. The name of the piece is Continuum, and it's eight feet high, eight feet through, eight feet across. Originally it was on a turntable, but Anna Bing bought it, and we placed it here in front of her theater. In the idea of topology, you have this sense of the continuous linear surface where the inside becomes the outside, where actually, if it were ideal, there would not even be a top or a bottom (but this definitely is on a base). These two pieces that I have put in at USC, they perhaps are not the first pieces for the USC campus, but certainly they are two of the first. And, in a way, they look toward many works of art in this area. We hope that there will be a sculpture garden here with many works by many artists. The spaces around the theaters are now being landscaped and . . .

ROGERS: The music department is that building right there,



I believe, Claire, and that marimba player was entertaining while we were there, playing Bach. So it's a lovely complex.

FALKENSTEIN: And now we're coming to the Eileen Norris [Cinema Theater], the new cinema theater donated by Eileen Norris, and in this I have done a piece symbolic of the cinema, and I call it Montage Section [formerly known as Film Strip]. It's a twenty-foot-long piece done in copper and sheet plastic. And I've painted on the plastic, so I have brilliant colors. The structure which holds it together is copper tubing, and it's held up in the air thirty feet high. In it I combined the sign again--this is my moving point as part of my vocabulary--and combined it with the transparent colors or orange, green, blue, and red, which are the basic colors for the development of the color in film. As you see, it's suspended in the entry, you can view it from outside or, as you move inside, you're looking up at it. The sign of the moving point is in black and on transparent plastic. And with, again, this topological motion; in fact, there are two Moebius bands within this structure. And, again, it has this sense of continuity and motion of the film in much the same way that it would occur when you would be editing and putting pieces together to form the montage.

\* \* \*



This is the model in my studio of the exact situation where I did the piece for USC for the new Eileen Norris Cinema Theater. And as you see, it's up in the air. Of course, this is three inches to the foot, and therefore quite small. The piece actually is twenty feet long and eight feet high and nine feet through. This is the proportion of the actual piece, and it is the entry section here.

ROGERS: That helps to see it in proportion like that, doesn't it, Claire? Do you often do this, build the whole model complete like this when you're working?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes. Every commission that I receive, I make a scale model, sometimes quite small, and sometimes quite large. For the St. Basil Church I made a quarter scale, which is three inches to the foot, and sometimes I make two inches to the foot, but it's always to scale so that I can work out all my problems.

In works like this [Point as a Set, No. 37], though, I don't do a model because I'm working out the idea as I do the piece. And the whole thing is one of quiet contemplation and concentrated study for the interstices. Now, each one of these elements here establishes a boundary, and the spaces between are the interstices. The idea is that there will be no interruption of the flow of space from the center to the exterior in the whole piece. The whole thing is in flow. I start from



the center, and I work out. And it takes a lot of concentrated effort to carry a work like this through. Sometimes I will start a piece like this and then put it away for a month or so and then bring it out, just as I'm doing with this. I haven't looked at this for at least two months, and now I'm beginning--as you see, the chalk marks here are indications of changes I'm going to make. Even the size may change. I mean, I've now established a size, but it may change; it may be a little bigger or a little smaller--it depends--because now I'm going to carry it through finally.

ROGERS: It's at one of the final stages of its . . .

FALKENSTEIN: But this is the final stage, and that is that I've worked it through; I know about the size of the interstice that I want to maintain, and I know about the size of the total, but it isn't finished in the sense that the flow isn't just as I want it all the way through.

ROGERS: Where did this piece start? What is the first process? Do you make a series of these separate units first?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, this is the sign of the "U" again, and, as you notice, some are rather straight and others are rather curved. I think about this in a symbolic way: the sign of the "U," but sections of the "U." So it doesn't matter whether you have the whole configuration; you have the "U" as an implied form throughout. So you





have that harmony to begin with, with the one form in repetition over and over. But the repetition becomes varied with position and proportion and length and configuration. So you have many, many kinds of elements there, I mean, many kinds of shapes. No two are alike, as a matter of fact.

ROGERS: How do these tools work out in a piece like that?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I use the clamp, I use the striker, I use the hammer, I use the pliers, I use the torch--and that's it. It's very simple; it's very primitive. And as a matter of fact, this is a very direct way of working; I mean, it's just simply seeing it, realizing how you want it, and placing it with welding.

ROGERS: This room has seen a lot of welding and hammering, and I believe that this is a very happy place for you to work. It seems to have everything in it that you need to accomplish what you see in your mind.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, my mind--my attitudes change to a degree, although I've kept to my technique of welding and welding metal for quite a while. I have worked with wood, and I've worked with ceramics and so on, but for quite a few years I've been working with metal. And, of course, there are lots of vibrations.

ROGERS: We can look around this room and see works in various stages of preparation, all the tools that you use to accomplish this. Looks like a lot of things



could happen in here beside art, if it were necessary.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, how do you mean? I don't understand.

ROGERS: Well, you have the basic tools that a workman would have.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, it's an industrial shop, an industrial metal shop, as a matter of fact. For instance, all these techniques of filing and welding and shaping and forming metals could be an industrial shop. I'm now finishing up the welds on a never-ending screen, put together by a heliarc machine, which was done some time ago, but now I'm finishing up and filing the welds.

ROGERS: This never-ending screen has taken form in quite a number of your works, hasn't it?

FALKENSTEIN: Yes, the never-ending screen was something that, as I said before, came into my work in 1957 in Paris, from the need of doing, of expressing an idea of extension into outer space, of no ending, of infinity, and yet to do a structure. And this sense of a matrix which goes on and on and on and on was the idea, and I call it the never-ending screen. And the first time I did it in a three-dimensional way was in 1961 for Peggy Guggenheim in Venice, in Italy for her Garden Gates. I did a three-dimensional structure for her. Then the second time I did it in a three-dimensional way was for St. Basil Church down on Wilshire, but treating it in an entirely different way, that is, on a much larger scale,



and using corten steel as a means. But it's the same principle; it's the never-ending screen done in three dimensions.

ROGERS: Over here we have a band saw and a drill press and a jigsaw--isn't this rather unusual to find a woman that can operate all this kind of machinery?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I don't think so. I think that when it comes to creativity and intellectual habits and possibilities, that a woman can express herself through the same tools that a man can. And I know some people say to me, "Oh, but how can you deal with such weighty materials?" and so on. But if you go into a man's studio and you see the same thing, you'll find out that he also, when he has extraordinary heavy loads to be concerned with, he has help. Women need help, but men need help, too. It's a matter of simply--I mean, finally we have to concern ourselves with the fact that there's no difference between men and women when it comes to concept. And how we carry it through has to do with training and discipline.

\* \* \*

ROGERS: Claire, we've taken a five-minute drive from your studio on the beach to a piece of property that you've just recently purchased which you have repaired and remodeled into a very fine storage unit for three



storages that were scattered around Los Angeles. What have you gathered together here?

FALKENSTEIN: I have here three storages of smaller works which go back to 1939 until 1976. This is a Point as a Set, No. 14, which has just come back from the San Francisco exhibition at the museum, entitled "200 Years of California Art" ["Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era"]. And this is a generic piece. I have done around thirty-six of these; each one is different in feeling, but the form is similar, and the technique is similar.

The painting above is called Vibrazioni Venezia; I did it in Venice, in Italy, and I wanted to express the richness and luxurious surface qualities of the Byzantine period which Venice seems to imply. And I have put my Never-Ending Screen on that, superimposed it to hold the gemlike pieces of glass, to suggest again a kind of richness. The piece was done in Venice, was done around 1963, and traveled throughout Europe.

The piece on the floor, another Point as a Set, No. 36, has just returned from Chicago and is a Point as a Set, but as you see, it has an entirely different kind of spirit. It's a lyrical, small piece, whereas the big one was aggressive and very active, outward moving; this is more an interior kind of piece. The chain which is on the base is an idea that I had around 1970; it is a kind of audience-participation piece because





one is able to rearrange the chain and organize it in various ways on that base which I made to go with it. It is an interesting combination of geometry and topology, I feel--the geometry in the base and the topology in the chain.

That is a very early wood piece [Sequoia] which is hard to see. It's about six feet long, and it is of a redwood burl that I did working in the field in Northern California, and here it is in my storage. And it was done many years ago.

This is called Homage to Scott Joplin, and it's about two years old. I have painted on transparent sheets of vinyl, and through the vinyl you can have this sense of a repeated rhythmic kind of syncopated action of the point. It's a moving point, but it's a moving point in conjunction with other moving points. And I feel that it has this ragtime quality of equality and yet syncopation.

This next piece [Blue Figure] is an early, very early piece that I did in San Francisco around the early part of the forties. At this time I was much influenced by the art of British Columbia, and I was working then in wood to a great extent. I hadn't yet got into metal or plastics or that sort of thing. I'd use color. It's a single-volume sculpture, which is hard for me to even consider now. But it's in my past, and there it is.

ROGERS: It has a very Northwest Coast feeling, the totems



and the carvings of the woods, the colorings of the woods.

FALKENSTEIN: This piece was done in 1948 in San Francisco, and I call it Flight. And it's one of the first that I opened up and made interstices, which later have become one of the main elements in my work. But here it's done in a very designed way, and in a mobile way, because each section is on a slot which can be changed in position so that you can arrange your openings in various ways. And, again, it's an audience-participation piece.

ROGERS: What is that made out of, Claire?

FALKENSTEIN: It's made out of sheet aluminum and walnut wood, walnut base with the slots set in.

ROGERS: Each one of these pieces is so different; it's almost as if someone else had done each piece.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, when one looks back over the past from the beginning, you'll find that one goes through many periods. But it's interesting, I think, how all of these contribute finally to what I'm doing now.

This piece [Interchange] was done in 1948 and is a continuation of the ideas of that sheet metal, the aluminum cutout, but this has become more organic in the sense of a three-dimensional interstice, large openings, these large spaces, and also the idea of moving one element against another, because I've attached it to a pair of pliers. And the material, too, is very plastic; it relates to my earlier work in ceramics, although it's



concrete (it's done with magnesite, which is a kind of cement). And the fact that I use color on it, too, is something new in the use of the large spaces, to continue them with the simulation through color of even more space. And this. . . .

ROGERS: This being a black-and-white film, Claire, maybe you'd like to describe the colors that are on it.

FALKENSTEIN: These colors are very earthy. There's yellow ochre, raw umber and black. And I don't know whether you can see the gradations on the screen. Whereas this one, I simply left it natural. But again, using, bringing motion and an enclosure, this is something new in my work (I mean up to that time). And again, this was done in '48, so it's a continuation. But all of this space here, all of this space in here, all this and all this, will finally lead me to a completely transparent metal structure; but here it's large and spatial and more designed. Later it becomes more organically a structure; here it's a design piece.

ROGERS: Did you do this engineering yourself?

FALKENSTEIN: Did I do what?

ROGERS: The engineering on this.

FALKENSTEIN: There's no engineering. I mean, all it is is just doing something. What engineering is this?

ROGERS: Well, they had to be made to revolve; there's a certain amount of . . .



FALKENSTEIN: I know, but that's so--I mean, this is a very simple thing; it's just moving around. There's no engineering in this. It's just feeling weights. ' You feel the weights, you don't calculate it--maybe that's what you mean. I mean, I knew that that would hold it.

ROGERS: How did you know that that would hold it?

FALKENSTEIN: Just felt it.

ROGERS: This black-and-white piece [Predator (Chariot)] needs a second look. There's a very common everyday object used as a base.

FALKENSTEIN: It is, but it was only a point of departure. As you see, it really is based on the shopping cart, but the actual meaning, the actual sense of this piece is a technique and an idea towards transparency. And as I had started out with the large open areas, I've come now to a completely transparent medium. And yet it's strong and it's structural.

ROGERS: What prompted you to use the shopping cart?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, when I moved into my house on the beach, this cart was there, and I put it out to be taken away; when, over a period of about a month, no one took it, I brought it in and made something out of it.

ROGERS: You recycled the shopping cart.

FALKENSTEIN: I recycled it. But it's interesting how this form is a continuation of the topological form that I've been working on, the organic forms that I've been





working on from the very beginning. And yet the material itself has become--I've made my material out of these, out of wire, brazed wire, and finally I have something that is a matrix of wire.

ROGERS: Is there any reason why you painted certain areas of it white and certain areas of it black?

FALKENSTEIN: Well, the reason I did that was to distinguish the two elements--the element of motion because this piece fits inside of this, and, therefore, you have this distinction between the inner and the outer structures.

ROGERS: Could you pull that out again so we can see how that unfolds?

FALKENSTEIN: Sure.

ROGERS: That's amazing. I don't ever think I'll look at a shopping cart the same way ever again. [laughter]

FALKENSTEIN: Now, this, for instance, going from this to sheet metal, is not as far away as it might seem. Because here again are the ideas of continuum and the continual kind of motion such as was in that and in the earlier pieces. But this is a later piece [CIS Galactic Transformation]; this is around 1969. That was around 1965, and that was shown at the Whitney. This was shown at the international show in the Brooklyn Museum on art and technology around '69. But I feel that the use of cutting and folding and bringing together in this way keeps me within my sphere of topology.



ROGERS: Well, Claire, we've had a short, representative tour--do you want to stand over here with me for a minute?--of your rooms here that have shown the history of your work and how you have evolved into the forms that you use right up to today. It hasn't anywhere near covered what is in here; there are over 3,000 pieces stored--paintings, drawings, sketches, sculptures. It would be impossible to do it all in one day, but we are very happy that we had a chance to see a little bit of the genius of Claire Falkenstein, and we thank you.

FALKENSTEIN: Well, I thank you, Marge, for all of the months that we've been working together and your pulling things out of me that I never would have revealed otherwise.

ROGERS: Well, I don't think we've even pulled it all out, but maybe that remains for another history to be written later, when you've done another twenty years of work. [laughter]

FALKENSTEIN: Thank you. If we last that long. . . .  
Well, we did it.



## APPENDIX

### RESTRICTED PORTIONS OF THE TRANSCRIPT

The Oral History Program grants to all its interviewees the privilege of restricting portions of the transcript. Falkenstein has chosen to restrict some of her comments for a period of years. They have been typed as an appendix. When the period of restriction has elapsed, they will be substituted for the blank pages herein bound.













































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WRITING

"Western Round Table"

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